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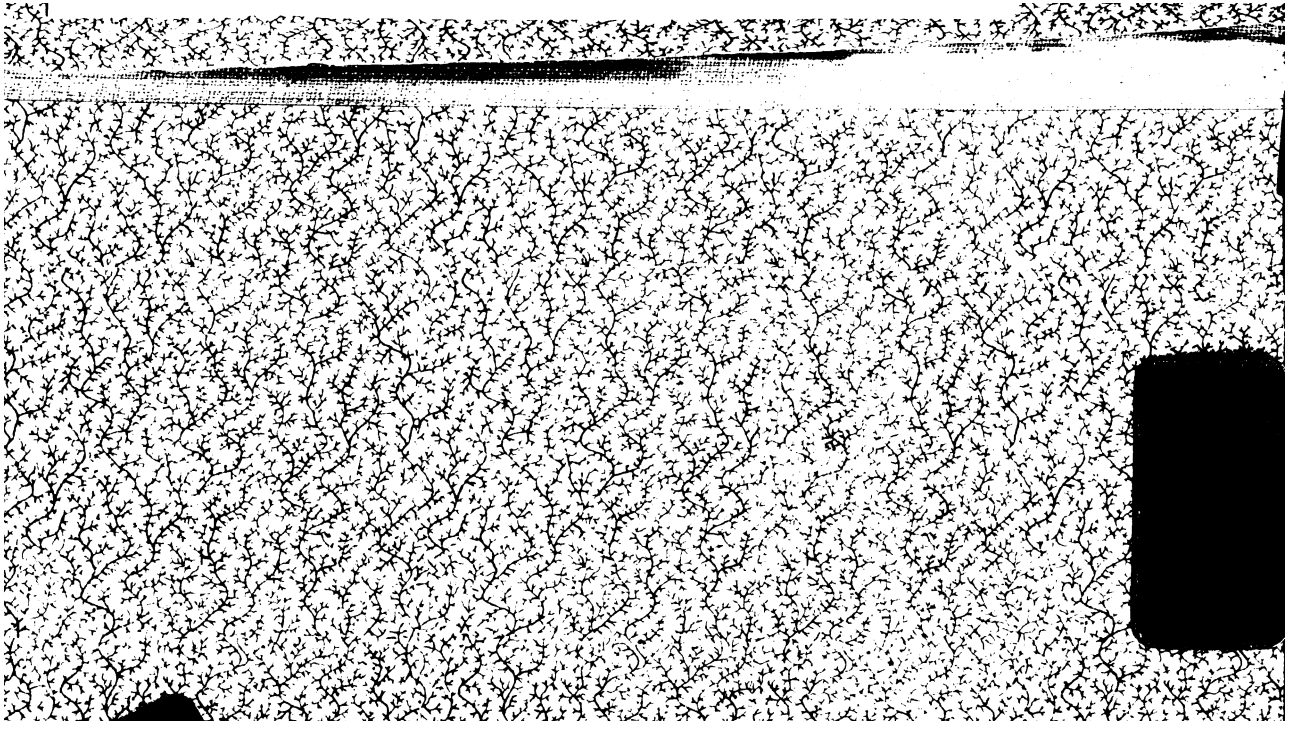

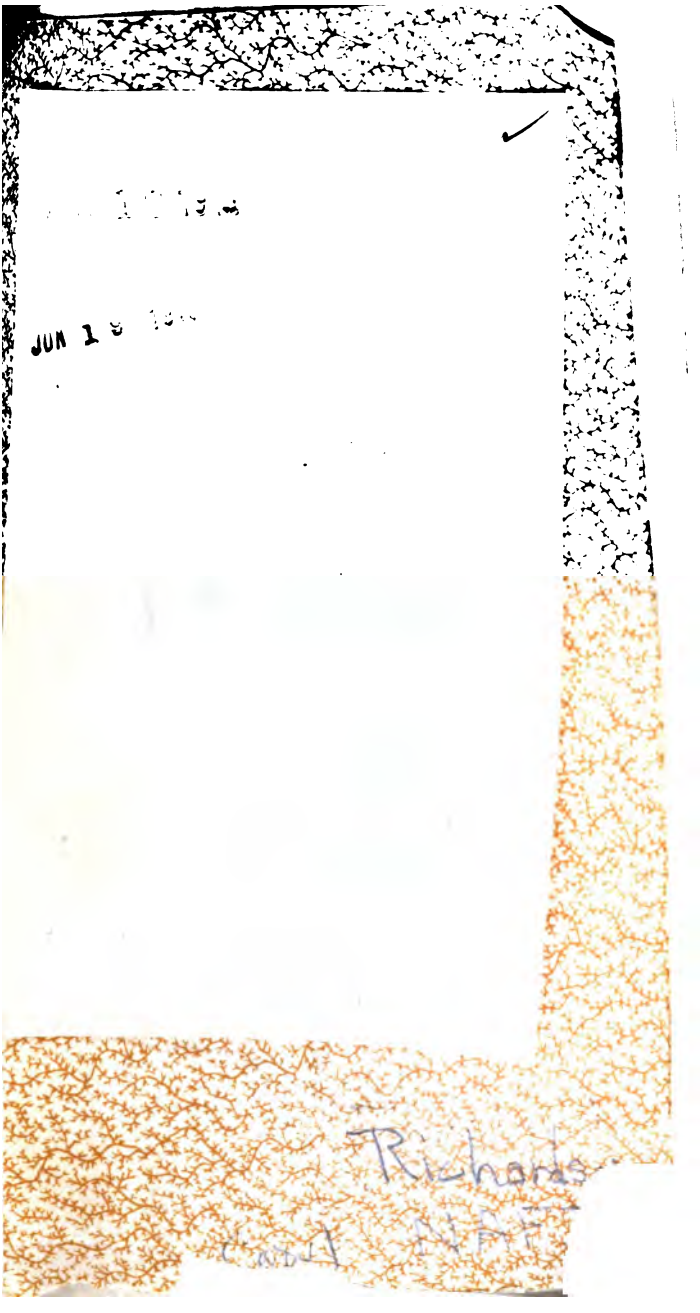
JUN 1
Richards

William Richardson, supposed au,

CURSORY

REMARKS

ON

TRAGEDY,

ON

SHAKESPEAR,

AND ON CERTAIN

French and Italian POETS,

PRINCIPALLY

TRAGEDIANS.

Nullius addictus jurare in verba magiſtri.
HOR.

I, fuge, ſed poteras tutior eſſe domi.
MARTIAL ad lib. ſuum.

LONDON:
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M.DCC.LXXIV.

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PREFACE.

THE following remarks have afforded ſome amuſement to the author in his leiſure hours, and he now ventures to give them to the public, fully ſenſible of the many imperfections of his work, but conſcious at the ſame time of the good intention with which it was compoſed. For it has been his aim throughout either to remove falſe, or miſtaken, or unjuſtly ſevere cenſures, that have been paſſed on foreign writers; or to ſhew the partiality or prejudice of thoſe, by whom our own are frequently as unjuſtly venerated. The critics, perhaps,

from whoſe opinions the author has ſometimes deviated in the following trifling obſervations, will condemn his preſumption in ſo doing: the generality of them are not only to be ranked among the genus irritabile, but have beſides ſo good an opinion of their own judgment and abilities, as to think that their word is law, to which the reſt of mankind, as of an inferior nature, are to ſubmit with deference and reſignation. In truth, they ſeem to have adopted a ſentiment of Antonio de Solis, * (though indeed he uſes it on a different occaſion) who ſays, that it is dangerous to allow freedom of ſpeech to thoſe, who are born to obey. Yet ſurely there can be no impropriety in aſſerting a right to think for oneſelf in literary matters,

at

* Vide Conquiſta de Mexico, cap. 2.

at a time too when an unlimited toleration is ſo ſtrenuouſly contended for in affairs of much greater moment, and which are of a much more abſtruſe and inſcrutable nature.

Yet oh unpardonable temerity! the author has preſumed to be ſevere in his ſtrictures on Shakeſpear, the idol of his countrymen; in whoſe praiſes ſo many productions have lately appeared, and written too with great ingenuity and plauſibility. But reaſoning is not neceſſarily included in a flow of words, nor is conviction inſpired by the muſic of a well-turn'd period. And the author cannot admire what he thinks reprehenſible; or join with others in condemning, where approbation ſeems to him to be more deſervedly due.

By the ſituation of our country we are divided from the reſt of the world, and hence perhaps the reaſon why we are in general contented with our own writers, and ſeem to think that perfection in modern literature is confined within the narrow limits of Great Britain. For the ornament of our perſons, for the luxuries of our tables no region is too diſtant to be explored, no ſea too boiſterous to be attempted; whilſt the circumſcribed ſpot, which we inhabit, is thought to be amply provided with all that is requiſite for the cultivation of our minds, the improvement of our taſte, and the amuſement of our literary hours. Some few of our wits indeed, for reaſons, which need not be here aſſigned, but which truth and impartiality can never approve, have treated

treated with uncommon acrimony the writers of other countries, with whom at the ſame time they ſeem to have had but a very ſlender acquaintance. The author wiſhes to be able to refute their calumnies, and to be himſelf candid and impartial. Happy if he can remove the prejudices of many, and ſhew them thoſe objects in a true light, which they have been taught to view through the falſe medium of preposſeſſion: or if (conſcious as he is of his own inabilities) this is more than he ſhall be able to effect, may he by his example excite ſome more able advocate to plead the cauſe of truth and juſtice.

He has not rendered into Engliſh the paſſages quoted from foreign writers, becauſe he thinks himſelf unequal

unequal to ſuch a taſk. Tranſlations in general convey but a very imperfect idea of the originals; to which they bear much the ſame reſemblance, as a dead body does to a living one. It is true, it may poſſibly be known by its features; but where is the vivid penetration of the eye, the ruddy warmth of complexion, the ſpirit, animation, and energy of the whole frame? It is a maſs of inactive, lifeleſs, loathſome clay.

Poetry, above all other ſciences, has been moſt generally cultivated; wherever religion and love prevail, there ſhe may always be found; no country ſo inhoſpitable but ſhe has deigned to viſit it; ſhe has cheated the tedious length of the burning ſands of Arabia, and diſſipated the gloomy

gloomy horrors of ice-bound Lapland. Nothing therefore, it is presumed, need be said in behalf of the author of the following sheets, for having endeavoured to recommend her altho' attir'd in a foreign dress. If however any one shall think it worth his while to censure him, either for the motives that induced him to take up the pen, or for the manner in which he has treated his subject, to such an one he shall content himself with applying the following lines of the Abbé Metastasio;

— Se'l mosse
Leggerezza; no' l curo:
Se follia; lo compiango.
Se ragion; gli son grato: e se in lui sono
Impeti di malizia; io gli perdono.

IN-

INTRODUCTION.

THE end of tragedy is to pleaſe and inſtruct; the means, by which that end is to be obtained, are terror and pity: theſe only are productive of the true pathetic, theſe only can inſpire that ſympathetic diſtreſs, that delicate melancholy which we feel for the misfortunes of others, more pleaſing to a ſenſible mind than the noiſier and more tranſient joys of mirth. To laugh at the foibles and abſurdities of others is common to all mankind; but to feel for the woes of others is the glorious prerogative of the humane. To awaken this tender paſſion, the tragedian muſt place before

us

us the repreſentation of actions, that have, or that might have happened: fiction muſt put on the air of truth, for to feel we muſt firſt believe, and to what we refuſe our credit, to that likewiſe ſhall we refuſe our tears. Improbabilities we can never approve, impoſſibilities muſt neceſſarily offend. It is the duty therefore of the tragic poet to adhere ſtrictly to vereſimilitude, not only in the ſubject of the drama, but in the conduct of it. His characters muſt be ſuch as exiſt in nature, or owe their ſuppoſed exiſtence to ſuperſtition, or fear, or credulity. The action ſhould be one, and ſuch as may be preſumed to have happened, if not in the time of the repreſentation, at leaſt in the ſpace of twenty four hours, that it may have ſome reſemblance to truth.

Ficta

Ficta voluptatis cauſâ ſint proxima veris
Neu quodcunque volet poſcat ſibi fabula credi.
Hor. de Arte Poet.

The unity of place is to be obſerved, for the tragic poet and the magician are different; the latter modo me Thebis modo ponat Athenis, to the former that power is not given.

Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour un ſeul fait accompli
Tienne juſqu'à la fin le theatre rempli.
Boileau.

But from this opinion a certain * critic will be found to diſſent, for he affirms that the unities are not eſſentially neceſſary. "Time, ſays "he, may be extended. If in the "firſt act preparations for war are "made

* Vide Dr. Johnſon's preface to Shakeſpear.

" made againſt Mithridates, the " event of that war may without " abſurdity be repreſented in the " cataſtrophe; for we know that " there is neither war nor prepa- " rations for war." But the queſtion is not about the reality, but the ſeeming poſſibility of the action repreſented. Now it is poſſible that ſome preparations for war might be made in the ſpace of three hours; but it is not poſſible that the preparations for war, and that the event of the war ſhould take place in ſo limited a time. It is poſſible for me to conceive that a perſon might appear at this inſtant with an army on his march to Poland; but it is not poſſible for me to conceive that he ſhould return victorious from that country in the ſpace of an hour and a half. He muſt have

have had a more expeditious conveyance than was ſuppoſed to be known to the magicians of old, for neither the dragons of Medea, nor the Hippogriff of Aſtolfo, could have tranſported him thither and back again in ſo ſhort a time. If Hannibal and Auguſtus were to be introduced upon the ſtage together, it would be contradictory to all hiſtory, and an extenſion of time with a vengeance; yet it would not be ſo abſurd, under certain reſtrictions at leaſt, as Fortinbras and his victory in Poland: for they might be brought together on the ſtage, without any mention of the events that happened between the periods of their ſeveral exiſtence; whereas the duration of the action in the tragedy of Hamlet fixes with preciſion the time that elapſes be-

between the firſt appearance of Fortinbras, and his return from a far diſtant country.

" The objection, ſays the ſame " critic, ariſing from the impoſſibi- " lity of paſſing the firſt hour at " Alexandria and the next at Rome, " ſuppoſes, that when the play " opens the ſpectator imagines him- " ſelf at Alexandria, and believes " that his walk to the theatre has " been a voyage to Egypt, and that " he lives in the days of Anthony " and Cleopatra." But the objection is not only to the impoſſibility, but to the impropriety of changing the place; for the ſpectator does not imagine that he is at Alexandria, he knows he is in a theatre; and whilſt he is there, if he knows he is not at Alexandria, he muſt know

à fortiori that he cannot be at Alexandria and at Rome too; if the ſtage cannot repreſent Venice, à fortiori, it cannot repreſent Venice and Cyprus too; if the ſtage is but one, the place cannot be more than one. The objection to removing the ſcene of action from one place to another ariſes from the diſguſt we feel at being preſented with one palpable impoſſibility upon another. Henry Stephens relates, that at Jeruſalem were ſhewn ſome drops of ſweat from the arch-angel Michael; we diſbelieve him, and wonder at his abſurdity. But when he continues his catalogue of reliques, and tells us, that there is alſo ſhewn a ray of the ſtar that guided the three kings, one of the cherubims nails, and a finger of the Holy Ghoſt quite freſh, each new circumſtance

ſerves but to encreaſe our diſguſt, and heighten our deteſtation of ſuch repeated falſities. To ſpeak mathematically, our decreaſe of faith and our increaſe of diſguſt, is to the thing repreſented or told, as the decreaſe of its vereſimilitude, and the encreaſe of improbable circumſtances attending it. Beſides, if the unity of place is not to be obſerved, who ſhall determine how often it may be changed? If the ſcene repreſents Alexandria at one time, and Rome at another, why may it not repreſent Mexico the next moment, then the Cape of Good Hope, Pekin, London, and ſo on, ſhifting the ſituation continually: for the critic aſks, "where is the abſurdity of allowing that ſpace to repreſent firſt "Athens, and then Sicily, which "was always known to be neither

"Sicily,

" Sicily, nor Athens, but a modern " theatre ? " By a parity of reaſoning the abſurd method of writing tragedies in rhimed verſe might be defended, as thus ; we know that men do not commonly ſpeak in blank verſe, but as we admit blank verſe in our tragedies, why may we not likewiſe admit rhime ? So becauſe we would fain perſuade ourſelves to attempt to leap over a wall ten feet high, we are to be driven at another that is twenty. In good truth the doughty critic ſeems diſpoſed to treat us as lord Peter did his brothers, who, becauſe they were willing for the ſake of domeſtic harmony and their own convenience, to allow that a cruſt of bread was excellent mutton, endeavoured to take advantage of this conceſſion, roſe in his demands, and affirmed,

that it was likewiſe a beer-glaſs of claret. The two brothers, ſtagger'd at the firſt, but quite confounded at the latter aſſertion, determined to be ſilent, and not to argue the point with a perſon ſo unreaſonable, and of a diſpoſition ſo untractable.

The ſame critic affirms, "that "it is falſe that any repreſentation "is miſtaken for reality." Now if ſcenery and decorations are not calculated to endeavour to make the ſpectator believe he is preſent at the place repreſented, to what purpoſe do they ſerve, and wherefore are they uſed? If it is not the aim of the actors to endeavour to paſs upon the audience for the perſons they repreſent, why are they to be dreſſed in character? If we ſuppoſe

poſe no degree of deluſion takes place, it is in vain that Mr. Garrick, in the part of Lear, aſſumes the hoary locks, the ſilver beard, the wrinkles, and decrepitude of a man ſunk in the low vale of years; he might as well perform the part in the fantaſtic dreſs of a petit-maître, or the motley habit of a jack-pudding. But ſuppoſe we allow, as we are very ready to do, that no dramatic repreſentation is, from its beginning to its end, miſtaken for a reality, it will not therefore follow, that a tragic poet is not bound to adhere to vereſimilitude. It is certain that a landſcape-painting is not miſtaken for a landſcape of nature, but at the ſame time the more it reſembles reality, the more it will pleaſe, the more merit

will it have. When we ſee a fine Claude, we are ſtricken with admiration and delight, and our firſt exclamation is, how natural it is! But were we to ſee a landſcape, in which the Pantheon at Rome, the Manſion Houſe at London, the ſtory of Apollo and Daphne, and the Iſraelites paſſing the Red Sea were to be repreſented; if, I ſay, we were to behold ſuch an extravagant medley on one piece of canvas, altho' every part of it were finiſhed in the moſt maſterly manner, the whole painting muſt neceſſarily appear monſtrous, and could not fail to diſpleaſe and diſguſt. A play is an imitation of nature, to reſemble nature it muſt reſemble truth, or the probability of truth, otherwiſe art will be too evident, contrary to the

the known maxim, ars eſt celare artem; or as Taſſo beautifully expreſſes it,

E quel che'l caro e'l bella accreſce a l'opre
L'arte che tutto fa nulla ſi ſcopre.
Gieruſalemme lib. canto 16.

We are further told, and by the ſame authority, that, "if there "be any fallacy, it is not that we "fancy the players, but that we "fancy ourſelves unhappy for a "moment, but we rather lament "the poſſibility than ſuppoſe the "preſence of miſery." Suppoſe me therefore at the theatre, with a ſcene before me of a heath, and a repreſentation of all the horrors of a midnight ſtorm, and Lear delivering himſelf in the following manner,

Rumble

Rumble thy belly full, ſpit fire, ſpout rain,
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters;
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindneſs,
I never gave you kingdoms. Then let fall
Your horrible vengeance, here I ſtand your ſlave,
A poor, infirm, weak and deſpis'd old man!

Now, according to the critic, I do not fancy Lear, or the actor, who performs the part, unhappy, but I fancy myſelf to be ſo. If I fancy myſelf unhappy, it muſt be for ſome cauſe; if for ſome cauſe, it can be no other than that which affects or is pretended to affect the actor: therefore I, who am no king, who am neither old nor infirm, who am not buffeted by the ſtorm, who have no daughters to be ungrateful to me, and no kingdoms to beſtow, ſuppoſe myſelf unhappy, becauſe Lear, who is old and infirm, is ex-

poſed

poſed to the raging elements, and does experience the ingratitude of his daughters. Can any thing be more prepoſterouſly abſurd than ſuch a ſuppoſition? But, ſays the ſame critic, "we rather lament the "poſſibility than ſuppoſe the pre-"ſence of miſery." Therefore I am unhappy, not becauſe I fancy myſelf in reality expoſed to the violence of the ſtorm, or ſuffering in reality through the cruelty of thankleſs daughters, but becauſe I may be ſo expoſed, and becauſe the time perhaps ſhall happen when I may have daughters, who may requite my generoſity and affection with unkindneſs and ingratitude. And I lament the poſſibility of this miſery in the ſame manner, "as a "mother weeps over her babe, "when ſhe remembers, that death

"may

"may take it from her." Now this alluſion, if applied to the caſe in queſtion, will by no means hold good; for the mother is here repreſented with her child, and her parental fondneſs will naturally lead her to fear the loſs of the object that engroſſes all her tender care and affection; but I, who do not enjoy the bleſſing of children, cannot, till I become a father, apprehend that death ſhould deprive me of them: I who am not in poſſeſſion of a particular good, cannot lament the poſſibility of loſing it, for I cannot loſe what I have not.

When I hear Mr. Garrick ſpeak the preceding lines with a ſenſibility and propriety unknown to others, I feel a mixture of pity and indignation; pity for the miſeries of the old father,

father, indignation at the treatment ſhewn him by his inhuman daughters. I feel, becauſe he ſeems to feel; and that I do involuntarily and inſtantaneouſly. I feel inſtantaneouſly, becauſe the indignant ſigh eſcapes me long before I can aſſimilate and weigh conſequences in my mind, and by a chain of complex ideas and comparative modes find out, that poſſibly in a courſe of years I too may experience,

How ſharper than a ſerpent's tooth it is
To have a thankleſs child.

I feel involuntarily, becauſe the imitation of anguiſh and diſtreſs is ſo vivid and exact, that I think, nay I am ſure, that for a moment it ſeems real, at leaſt to me it does. An object of ſeeming miſery, painted

ed in all the faſcinating colours of countenance and geſture, and expreſſing its agonizing feelings in all the powerful eloquence of words, is before our eyes; we ſee, we hear, we pity. The tear ſtands trembling in the eye, a chill runs through the whole frame, and the heart beats with convulſive throbs, before we can aſk ourſelves, whether the grief repreſented in ſo lively a manner, be real, or fictitious. And for the truth of this aſſertion I appeal to all thoſe whoſe ſenſations are not blunted by torpid indifference or ſtoic apathy.

Rembrant painted the portrait of his maid, and expoſed it at a window, at which ſhe had uſed frequently to place herſelf. Her neighbours came as uſual, and deceived

ceived by the exact reſemblance began to enter into converſation with the picture. Shall we then allow it to be poſſible that a piece of painted canvas may be miſtaken for the very perſon, of whom it is but the inanimate and motionleſs image, and at the ſame time aſſert that we cannot be deluded by any living repreſentation into a belief, that the diſtreſsful countenance, ſupported by words and actions perfectly ſuited to the occaſion, is an indication of real grief and affliction? But the neighbours went to the window in expectation of ſeeing the ſervant herſelf, and not her picture; whereas we go to the theatre in expectation not of ſeeing the action itſelf, but only the repreſentation of it. I confeſs it: yet whoever in the midſt of a ſcene,

in

in which Mr. Garrick calls forth all his wonderful powers to paint diſtreſs in himſelf, and excite pity in his audience, I ſay, whoever at ſuch a critical inſtant, can turn aſide to view any other object, or not forget his own ſituation, and be wholly wrapt up in that of the inimitable performer, is to be pitied, not envied, for his compoſure and ſang froid. In fact at all theatrical exhibitions, which deeply intereſt and affect, we rather perceive than think. When we behold Lear's countenance, the very picture of diſtreſs, and hear him ſpeak the very language of woe, the mind is rather paſſive than active; it perceives, and cannot avoid perceiving, as Mr. Locke juſtly obſerves, whilſt the eyes and ears are open. Now if there is perception, ſome ſenſation muſt

muſt be produced in the mind. In the preſent inſtance the perception is that of grief, the ſenſation is that of pity: for we feel, if we have any ſenſibility, a natural and immediate impulſe to compaſſionate that perſon who ſeems to be unhappy.

It appears therefore that there is a certain degree of deluſion, tranſient and momentary though it be; for as ſoon as we begin to reflect, our pity ſubſides; our judgment informs us we have been deceived, and we are happy to find that it was but a deception. I do not mean to extend this notion ſo far, as to ſuppoſe, that there is a deluſion from the beginning to the concluſion of a tragedy; I do not mean to ſay, that when Mr. Garrick, in

the character of Lear, with calmneſs and compoſure declares his reſolution to divide his kingdom, and to confer it on Gonerill, Regan, and Cordelia, that then we really believe him to be Lear; for we hear him with an equal degree of calmneſs and compoſure, our mind remains unagitated, and is at leiſure to reaſon and reflect. But when he ſeems racked by the contending paſſions of ſorrow and reſentment, we are then no longer calm and indifferent, our paſſions, like his, are actuated, and it is then that by a ſympathy congenial to our natures, we feel for his unhappy ſituation; and he ſtrikes us as an old and wretched father, more ſinned againſt than ſinning. If he did not appear to us in this light, we ſhould remain unintereſted, unaffected ſpectators;

tators; and in fact are ſo, as ſoon as we reflect and become conſcious, that he is Mr. Garrick, and not Lear; that his miſery is fictitious, and not real.

"The delight of tragedy, ſays "the ſame writer, proceeds from "our conſciouſneſs of fiction; if "we thought murders and treaſons "real, they would pleaſe no more." According to this notion, there can be no pleaſures ariſing from ſubjects of real ſorrow and affliction: yet whoever is in the leaſt acquainted with the philoſophy of the paſſions, muſt be convinced of the contrary. Why are public executions ſo much frequented? why does the village croud run with precipitancy, and climb the clift to ſee the bark daſhed to pieces on the rocks be-

low, and their fellow creatures periſhing amidſt the infuriate waves?

Non quia vexari quemquam eſt jucunda voluptas,
Sed quibus ipſe malis careas quia cernere ſuave eſt.

Lucretius, lib. 2.

It is not treaſon itſelf, or the perpetration of murder on the ſtage, but their effects on the ſpectator, that give him pleaſure; by rouſing the mind from indolence and indifference; by exciting the moſt comfortable ideas of our own preſent ſecurity, and exemption from ſuch calamities; and by raiſing in us the flattering notions, that ſuch enormities cannot fail to meet with their due puniſhments. This pleaſure is farther increaſed by our ſenſations

ſenſations of pity and compaſſion for the unhappy ſufferers; ſenſations that owe their riſe to humanity, that noble characteriſtic of man, which draws the ſocial powers to their right ends and purpoſes, and converts our tears to rapture. I am well perſuaded that it is no eaſy taſk to point out the true cauſe, why pleaſure ſhould ariſe from ſubjects of pain; it has hitherto been but imperfectly explained by any one, and I confeſs it is not in my power to give ſuch reaſons for it, as may ſatisfy either the reader or myſelf. May we not however add one more to thoſe already ſuggeſted, and ſay, that the agreeable ſenſations we feel in ſorrow, reſult from the intimate alliance between pleaſure and pain? Pleaſure, when urged too far, may

him, and for one beautiful view of nature, preſent him with many ſavage ſcenes of barrenneſs and horror? The one is the track of the tragic poet, who follows dramatic laws, the other is the track of the tragic poet of nature. Nor are we to ſuppoſe that rules are an unneceſſary preſcription, or that they reduce nature into method more than is convenient or fit. Does the clown, who never received inſtructions, dance a more graceful minuet, than one, who has practiſed under a Gallini or a Veſtris? Are the works of a ſelf-taught painter to be put in competition with thoſe of the pupils of a Raphael, a Titian, or a Caracci?

Learn then for antient rules a juſt eſteem,
To copy nature is to copy them.
Pope's Eſſay on Criticiſm.

But

But I am aſhamed to argue any longer in defence of a doctrine, not only ſupported by authorities of the greateſt weight and conſequence, but which is in itſelf ſo conſiſtent with reaſon and good ſenſe. Let then the critic triumph in the ſtrength of his arguments, if he thinks they have any, and pleaſe himſelf with the notion of having gained followers and admirers of his ſentiments; but when Phocion had given his opinion in a cauſe that was under debate, and found that it was applauded by his auditors, he turned to a friend, and aſked him, if he had not ſaid ſome fooliſh thing.

CURSORY

REMARKS, &c.

ON

SHAKESPEAR.

IT has been the prevailing fashion for some years past to launch out into the most extravagant praises of our countryman Shakespear, and to allot him beyond all competition the first place as a tragic writer. Compared with him,

him, Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, are fantaſtic compoſers, void of hiſtorical truth, imitation of character, or repreſentation of manners; mere declaimers, without energy or fire of action, and abſurdly introducing, upon all occaſions, tedious, inſipid, unintereſting love-ſcenes. But, prejudice apart, is he ſo tranſcendently their ſuperior, and is he the glorious luminary that ſhines?

—— velut inter ignes
Luna minores, . . .

Hor.

Shall I venture to proceed further, and aſk, if he be in general even a good tragic writer? We have ſeen, in the preceeding pages, what are ſome of the moſt material rules for dramatic compoſitions, as preſcribed by Ariſtotle and other eminent maſ-

ters

ters in the art of criticiſm: rules conſonant to reaſon, and calculated to deceive the ſpectator into a perſuaſion, that he is intereſted in a real event, whilſt time, place, and action, conſpire to ſtrengthen the deluſion: rules dictated by the wiſe, approved by the learned, and adopted by writers of judgment, genius, and taſte of all nations. But theſe were either totally unknown to Shakeſpear, or wilfully neglected by him. Inſtead of confining the action to a limited time, he takes in the ſpace of days, months, and even years; inſtead of adhering to the unity of place, by a prepoſterous magic he tranſports the ſpectator in the ſhifting of a ſcene, from Italy to Britain, from Venice to Cyprus, from the court of England to that

of

of France; and ſhall I not be permitted to exclaim,

Quodcunque oſtendis mihi ſic incredulus odi.
Hor. de Arte Poet.

But Shakeſpear can ſay with the muſician in Homer,

Αὐλοδιδακτος δ' εἰμὶ: Θεος δε μοι ἐν φρεσὶν οἵμας
Παντοίας ενεφυσεν.

Ipſe autem à me ſum doctus. Deus enim in mente cantilenas
Omnigenas inſevit.
Odyſ. Lib. 22.

His genius therefore is not to be reſtrained by the ſhackles of critic laws; his audacious fancy, his enthuſiaſtic fire, are not to ſubmit to the tame inſtitutions of an Ariſtotle or a Quintilian. So then he is to be indulged in tranſgreſſing the bounds of nature, in neglecting to give

give to fiction the air of truth, and in impoſing the moſt palpable incongruities and moſt ſtriking impoſſibilities on the audience, becauſe he dares. Mr. Pope's partiality ſeems to have gotten the better of his uſual juſtice and candour, when he obſerves, that we are not to apply the rules of Ariſtotle to Shakeſpear; "for that, ſays he, would be like "trying a man by the laws of one "country, who acts under thoſe of "another." Yet ſurely there are laws of general ſociety as well as of particular communities, laws that bind each individual as a citizen of the world; the infringment of which would juſtly excite the univerſal indignation and reſentment of mankind. In moſt countries, England excepted, certain poſitions and rules have been holden ſacred and inviolable

inviolable in the literary as well as in the political word: theſe did the antient Greek tragedians obſerve and cultivate, and to theſe have the moſt eminent amongſt the modern Italians and French ſcrupulouſly adhered. But our excentric Engliſh tragedian has preſumed to quit the beaten track, and has boldly ventured to turn aſide into the regions of the moſt wild, moſt fantaſtic imagination. With an unprecedented, with an unpardonable audacity, has he overleaped the pale of credibility, a boundary too confined for his romantic genius. Preſented by him with impoſſibilities inſtead of the appearance of truth, we remain undeluded ſpectators.

——Queis ſic extorta voluptas
Et demtus per vim mentis gratiſſimus error.
Hor.

And

And although we may be affected by particular paſſages in any one of his plays, yet the whole of the repreſentation cannot be very intereſting on account of its extravagance. Let us not therefore approve, let us not even extenuate thoſe faults in Shakeſpear, that juſtice, that common ſenſe, would lead us to condemn in others. But with an impartiality that becomes every man, who dares to think for himſelf, let us allow him great merit as a comic writer, greater ſtill as a poet, but little, very little, as a tragedian: for, as Quinctilian ſays of Seneca, Velles eum ſuo ingenio dixiſſe, alieno judicio. Digna enim fuit illa natura, quæ meliora vellet, quæ quod voluit effecit. Perhaps it will be ſaid, that Shakeſpear wrote, when learning, taſte, and manners were pedantic,

unrefined, and illiberal; that none but ſuch motley pieces, as his are, could pleaſe the greater part of his audience, the illiterate, low-liv'd mechanics; that ſome of his characters were neceſſitated to ſpeak their language; and that their burſts of applauſe were to be purchaſed even at the expence of decency and common ſenſe. When we conſider his ſituation and circumſtances, that in lieu of the

— hoſpita muſis
Otia, et exemtum curis gravioribus ævum.
Sil. Ital. lib. 12.

he was expoſed to all the miſeries of poverty and want; that to live he was conſtrained to write, and to adapt himſelf to the humour of others; it muſt be acknowledged, that he deſerves our pity rather than our cenſure.

cenſure. But when we come to conſider him as a tragic writer, and to weigh his merit as ſuch, a ſtandard muſt be eſtabliſhed, by which our judgments are to be determined: where then are we to look for this nice criterion of merit, but in thoſe works, that have been the delight of paſt ages, and are the admiration of the preſent.

Let it not be advanced as a merit, let it not be urged even as an excuſe, that Shakeſpear followed nature in the buſy walks of men; that he preſented her, as he found her, naked and unadorned: for there are parts of nature that require concealment; there are others too that by the thin tranſparent veil, by the light, the careleſs drapery, are greatly

heightened and improved; for then the roving fancy,

Ivi ſi ſpazia, ivi contempla il vero
Di tante miraviglie a parte a parte,
Poſcia al deſio le narra, e le deſcrive,
E ne fa le ſue fiamme in lui più vive.
Gierus. lib. canto 4.

The ſcene of the grave-diggers in Hamlet is certainly real life, or as it is vulgarly termed, highly natural, yet how miſplaced, how unworthy the tragedian:

Nec ſpirat tragicum ſatis, aut feliciter audet.
Hor.

To the credit of the preſent times indeed theſe puerilities are now omitted; let us hope they will not be the only ones, nor let us be afraid to reject what our anceſtors, in conformity to the groſſer notions then prevalent,

prevalent, beheld with pleaſure and applauſe.

It is not long ago that even a comedy, which had a conſiderable ſhare of merit, met with an unfavourable reception, on account of a low illiberal dialogue; though it was perfectly adapted to the perſons between whom it paſſed. Nor has there, I believe, been found more than one haughty over-grown critic, who has dared to cenſure the public for expreſſing their diſapprobation of language, that became a ſpunging-houſe indeed, but was highly improper for the ſtage; which even the comic muſe, ſportive and mirthful though ſhe be, is not permitted to tread, but with a certain eaſy politeneſs, a certain graceful decorum.

It muſt be acknowledged, that Shakeſpear abounds in the true ſublime; but it muſt be allowed that he abounds likewiſe in the low and vulgar. And who is there, that after ſoaring on eagle wings to unknown regions and empyreal heights, is not moſt ſenſibly mortified to be compelled the next moment to grovel in dirt and ordure. In the firſt caſe (and if he mounts with Shakeſpear it will frequently happen) he may chance to be dazzled with the exceſſive glare, even till his "eye-balls "crack;" certain it is, that a perſon may gaze on the blazing majeſty of the ſun, that glorious author of light and vital warmth, when properly regarded, untill his ſight ſhall be obſcured, and himſelf vainly endeavour to explore his way through the intricate maze of darkneſs and confuſion;

confuſion; a labyrinth in which our author is ſometimes bewildered, and from which it will require an Ariadne's clue to reſcue him. What a contraſt there is between the ſublime and the bathos! yet how cloſely are they united in Shakeſpear! Fired with the exalted ſentiments of his heroes, from whoſe mouths virtue herſelf ſeems to dictate to mankind, we feel our hearts dilate, the current of our blood flow ſwifter in every vein, and our whole frame wound up to a pitch of dignity unfelt, unknown before. Although we could not expect that our enthuſiaſm ſhould remain in its full energy and force, yet of itſelf it would ſubſide by degrees into a benign complacency and univerſal philanthropy. How cruel is it then to hurry us from heroes and philoſophers into a crew

of plebeians, grave-diggers, and buffoons; from the bold tropes and figures of nervous and manly eloquence, from the ſage leſſons of morality, ſuch as a Minerva might have inſpired, or a Socrates have taught, to the obſcure jeſt or low quibble, that baſe counterfeit of wit, which, like the monkey when compared with man, is rendered more diſguſting by an unſightly reſemblance.

Shakeſpear's preternatural beings ſeem to need little or no juſtification; they are ſuch as were ſanctified by tradition and vulgar credulity; he has ſupported them with dignity and ſolemnity, has made them greatly inſtrumental in the cataſtrophe of his pieces, and has in general introduced them on proper occaſions: I ſay in general only, becauſe in ſome inſtances

inſtances they are unneceſſary, and therefore to be condemned. On the contrary the ghoſt in Hamlet is neither uſeleſs, nor introduced improperly; it comes to reveal unknown, unexpiated crimes; here is the dignus vindice nodus. But it would be fruitleſs to ſay any thing more on this point, as it has been already treated in ſuch a maſterly manner by the very ingenious author of the remarks on the writings and genius of Shakeſpear, to whoſe merit I am not the leſs inſenſible, though on many occaſions I may be led to differ in opinion.

The morals of Shakeſpear's plays are in general extremely natural and juſt; yet why muſt innocence unneceſſarily ſuffer? why muſt the hoary, the venerable Lear, be brought with

with ſorrow to the grave? Why muſt Cordelia periſh by an untimely fate? the amiable, the dutiful, the innocent Cordelia! She that had already felt the heart-rending anger of a much beloved, but haſty miſtaken father! She that could receive, protect, and cheriſh a poor, infirm, weak, and deſpiſed old man, although he had ſhowered down curſes on her undeſerving head! That ſuch a melancholy cataſtrophe was by no means neceſſary, is ſufficiently evinced by the manner in which the ſame play is now performed. Ingratitude now meets with its proper puniſhment, and the audience now retire, exulting in the mutual happineſs of paternal affection, and filial piety. Such, if practicable, ſhould be the winding up of all dramatic repreſentations, that mankind

kind may have the moſt perſuaſive allurements to all good actions: for although virtue depreſſed may be amiable, virtue triumphant muſt be irreſiſtable.

But it may perhaps be objected by ſome, that the death of the wicked cannot occaſion pity; and if innocence and virtue are not to fall beneath the ſtroke of oppreſſion and injuſtice, where is the pathos, where is the tender ſympathy? To this it may be anſwered, in the unmerited misfortunes, in the agonizing diſtreſs of the innocent; in ſeeing the virtuous involuntarily led to the perpetration of ſome horrid crime, or in the dread apprehenſion of having already committed it, or tottering on the very brink of perdition. What a critical, what an intereſting

ſituation

ſituation is it to the ſpectator, when he beholds Merope, ſeemingly reduced to the dreadful alternative of ſeeing her ſon periſh, or of giving herſelf to the murderer of her huſband? Again, what horror do we feel, when we ſee her with her arm uplifted upon the point of killing that very ſon, whoſe death ſhe means to revenge! It is not my deſign to condemn thoſe tragedies, in which innocence falls a victim to treachery or violence; we ſee but too many inſtances of it in real life; conſequently it cannot be improper for the ſtage, which ought to repreſent living manners. I would be underſtood therefore not to reject other tragedies, but to give the preference to thoſe, in which death, puniſhment, or remorſe, await the guilty only. And as at all dramatic repre-

repreſentations I am to ſee but an imitation of nature, let the deluſion be on the ſide of virtue, that I may ſtill flatter myſelf with the pleaſing belief, that to be good is to be happy.

From contemplating the works of Shakeſpear, let us for a moment turn our eyes to thoſe of Tintoret. What an enthuſiaſm of genius, what a boldneſs and impetuoſity of pencil! What an hardineſs of colouring, what an intelligence of light! Yet how neglectful in finiſhing, his attitudes how ungraceful, how extravagantly contraſted! Where ſhall we find in him that beautiful chaſteneſs, that enchanting harmony of the whole, ſo conſpicuous in the works of ſeveral other eminent artiſts? With ſuch imperfections who will

If, after what I have ſaid, any paſſionate admirer of Shakeſpear ſhall think, that I hold cheap the idol of his heart, he is miſtaken: I too can willingly offer incenſe at the ſame ſhrine; I too can feel with an equal degree of tranſport all his unrivaled ſtrokes of nature, all his wonderful deſcriptive and creative powers; can love with Romeo, be jealous with Othello, can moralize with Hamlet, grow diſtracted with Lear; but I cannot talk bawdry with Mercutio, nor intoxicate myſelf with Caſſio; I cannot play the fool with Polonius, nor the puppy with Oſwald. In fine, whilſt we conſider thee, O divine Shakeſpear, in any other light than that of a tragic poet,

—— tibi maturos largimur honores,
Nil oriturum alias, nil ortum tale fatentes.
Hor. ep. i. lib. 2.

It

It has been obſerved by Dr. Johnſon in his elaborate preface to Shakeſpear, that no one has diſcovered in his works any imitation of the Italians, although the Italian poetry was at that time high in eſteem. I confeſs I never red any authors of that nation with a view of diſcovering, whether Shakeſpear had imitated them or not: the following lines however from the Orlando Innamorato rifatto da Berni ſtruck me as bearing a great reſemblance to a ſpeech in Othello: whether it be an imitation or not, I ſhall not take upon me to ſay, but preſent the reader with both paſſages, and leave him to determine for himſelf.

Chi ruba un corno, un cavallo, un anello, *
E ſimil coſe, ha qualche diſcrezione,

E potrebbe chiamarſi ladroncello;
Ma quel che ruba la riputazione,
E dell' altrui fatiche ſi fa bello,
Si puo chiamare aſſaſſino e ladrone,
E di più odio e pena è degno
Quanto più del dover trapaſſa il ſegno.

Lib. ii. canto. 22.

Who ſteals my purſe ſteals traſh, 'tis ſomething, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been ſlave to thouſands;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

Othello.

* Alluding to Brunello who had ſtolen the things mentioned. Berni died according to ſome in 1538, according to others in 1543. Shakeſpear was born in 1564.

ON

ON

CORNEILLE,

RACINE,

AND

VOLTAIRE.

Modeſtè tamen et circumſpecto judicio de tantis viris pronuntiandum eſt, ne, quod pleriſque accidit, damnent quæ non intelligunt. Ac ſi neceſſe eſt in alteram errare partem, omnia eorum legentibus placere, quàm multa diſplicere, maluerim.

Quinctil. Inſtitut. Lib. 10.

ON

CORNEILLE.

CORNEILLE was the firſt in France, as Shakeſpear was in England, who brought the tragic muſe into any degree of honour and repute. Mairet, Rotrou, Durier, Scuderi, and ſome others, had indeed written for the ſtage, but in a ſtyle and manner that ſavoured much too ſtrongly of the Gothic barbariſm of the times. Surrounded as Corneille was by bad models of dramatic compoſitions, whoſe authors were applauded and careſſed by Cardinal Richelieu, he ſcorned to ſeek the ſame protection by the ſame means; but ſtrove to gain the reputation of an author, rather than of a court-favourite.

The warm and zealous partiſans of Shakeſpear are ever forward to defend his groteſque and miſshapen tragedies by pleading the taſte of the times, with which, as writing for the amuſement of the public, he was obliged to comply; and ghoſts, witches, grave-diggers, and buffoons are to appear in company with kings and heroes; nor are we to cenſure him for preſenting us with ſuch extravagant medlies, becauſe they hit the level, and gained the applauſe of an uninformed barbarous audience. Upon the ſame grounds much may be ſaid in defence of Corneille, and it would be abſurd in us to deny that favour to him, which we are ſo forward to ſhew our countryman. The manners of the age in which Corneille lived were ſtrongly tainted with the ſpirit of

of chivalry and romance; and although tilts, tournaments, and cruſades were happily aboliſhed, yet the fury of duelling prevailed, and the ſpirit of gallantry and love remained in full force. Amadis de Gaul, Palmerin of England, Dan Belianis, and a whole tribe of French romances were in the hands of every one; and infected not only the poets, but even the proſe-writers of the age: for Balzac and Voiture are little more than knight-errants in letter-writing. If Shakeſpear abounds in ſcenes of murder and bloodſhed, Corneille deals as largely in love-intrigues. If Shakeſpear's chief perſonages have ſometimes their impertinent buffoons, Corneille's heroes have their inſipid confidants. If the dialogue of the one is ſometimes low, vulgar,

and indecent, that of the other is as often tedious, romantic, and extravagant. If any excuſe can be urged in extenuation of ſuch faults and indecorums, the ſame ought to ſerve for both; for they were both under the ſame neceſſity of adapting themſelves to the humour and caprice of the times, in which they lived. With an unparalleled enthuſiaſm of fancy, Shakeſpear tranſports us into the airy regions of the ſublime, to which Corneille perhaps does not ſo often riſe; ſometimes, indeed, with our Engliſh bard he is hurried into the turgid and bombaſt, ſometimes with him he wanders in the pathleſs obſcure: ſeldom however does he ſwerve from the laws of propriety and decorum, ſeldom, when compared with Shakeſpear, does he deviate from thoſe rules,

rules, the obſervance of which ſeems eſſentially neceſſary; as in all dramatic compoſitions regard ought to be had to the appearance of truth. For this reaſon it is that, however his inferior in other reſpects, he has a right of precedence above his Engliſh rival, when conſidered as a tragic writer. He had beſides a difficulty to ſtruggle with, happily unknown in this country, I mean the neceſſity of compoſing in rhime; a rude monkiſh invention, which the French have rendered more abſurd, as well as more arduous, by a prepoſterous diſtinction of ſex. Although I would by no means allow merit in an author merely for having obſerved ſo rigid a law; yet we ought to make ſome allowance in his favour, whoſe limbs are, as it were, confined in fetters,

and

and denied their free exertion and full force. The facility of writing blank verſe is far from being ſo great, as Voltaire aſſerts it to be; yet as it approaches nearer to common diſcourſe, it requires much leſs labour and effort on the part of the writer, than the compoſition of rhime.

As regularity in the conduct of the drama, and an adherence to the unities are in the opinion of the author neceſſary to form the perfect tragedian; it is not his intention to make any remarks on thoſe plays of Corneille, in which he has neglected to obſerve them; for which reaſon he ſhall paſs unnoticed ſome of his moſt celebrated pieces.

The tragedy of Cinna has afford-

ed

ed ample ſcope for cenſure, and the critic * has begun by ridiculing the tedious ſoliloquy, with which Emilia opens the firſt ſcene; but has forgotten to obſerve, that the ſaid ſpeech is by no means approved by the French themſelves, and is generally omitted in the repreſentation. It is a remark of the ſame critic, ‡ that nothing ſo much deforms the feminine character, as ferocity of ſentiment; and that, as we have no knowlege of Toranius, the father of Emilia, who was proſcribed by Auguſtus, we are no more concerned about any cruelty committed upon him, that upon any other man, and conſequently not prepared to enter into the outrageous reſentment of Emilia. Ferocity of temper

* Vide remarks on the writings and genius of Shakeſpear, p. 207, 2d edit. ‡ Ibid. p. 210.

per is ſo repugnant to the nature of the ſex in general, that we look upon ſuch diſpoſitions with horror; yet ſurely if any motive can be ſuppoſed to baniſh ſoftneſs and tenderneſs from the female breaſt, revenge, for injuries received, can alone accompliſh ſuch a change. Now Emilia is preciſely in ſuch a ſituation: ſhe had loſt a beloved father by the proſcription of Auguſtus in his triumvirate, ſhe was deſirous of revenging his death upon his murderer, who indeed, according to Corneille, had adopted her as his daughter, and ſhewn her diſtinguiſhed marks of his affection: yet ſuch conduct on his part could not efface the injuries he had offered her.

Toute cette faveur ne me rend pas mon pere;
Et de quelque façon que l'on me conſidere,
Abondante

Abondante en richeſſe, ou puiſſante en credit,
Je demeure toujours la fille d'un proſcrit.

It is in vain that Auguſtus reminds her,.

Songe avec quel amour j'élevai ta jeuneſſe ;

whilſt ſhe can ſay of her father,

Il éleva la vôtre avec même tendreſſe,
Il fut votre tuteur et vous ſon aſſaſſin ;
Et vous m'avez au crime enſeigné le chemin :
Le mien d'avec le votre en ce point ſeul difere,
Que votre ambition s'eſt immolé mon pere,
Et qu'un juſte courroux dont je me ſens bruler,
A ſon ſang innoçent vouloit vous immoler.

Revenge is ſuppoſed to be the ſtrongeſt paſſion that can agitate the human mind ; it can plant daggers in the hand of gentleneſs itſelf, and urge to deeds of bloodſhed and horror,

ror, diſpoſitions "full o' the milk "of human kindneſs." Let the critic, who is ſo forward to object to the behaviour of Emilia, conſider the more ſavage, nay the monſtrous character of lady Macbeth; and ſee if the latter can be exculpated for not only inſtigating to murder, but even imbruing her hands in the blood of the murdered. Ambition, or at leaſt the deſire of graſping crowns and empires, is a paſſion inherent in few female breaſts, a ſenſibility of injuries is common to all. If Emilia muſt appear odious to the ſpectator, in what light will he look upon lady Macbeth, when he hears her ſay, that her huſband "would be great is not "without ambition," yet adds,

— Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my ſpirits in thine ear,

And

And chaſtiſe with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphyſic aid doth ſeem
To have thee crowned withal.

Further, when with a brutality, the very idea of which is ſhocking to human nature, ſhe affirms,

— I have given ſuck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was ſmiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from its boneleſs gums
And daſht his brains out, had I but ſo ſworn
As you have done to this.

Not content with the bare notion of murder, ſhe refines upon it, and exaggerates the circumſtances of horror, by repreſenting helpleſs innocence, with all its irreſiſtleſs ſmiles, pleading in vain for mercy and compaſſion. Whoever can approve

a tragedy, in which ſuch a monſter, for ſhe is not worthy the name of a woman, bears a principal part, has no reaſon to object to the ferocity of Emilia, who is actuated by ſentiments far leſs cruel, and ſuch as nature is but too apt to inſpire.

Cinna has more of the heroic lover in romance than of the Roman patriot. The character of Auguſtus is maintained with dignity and propriety, except in the following ſpeech to Livia,

Vous m'avez bien promis des conſeils d'une femme,
Vous me tenez parole, et c'en ſont là, madame :

which contains not only an inſulting reproof, but is contradictory to hiſtory ; for Seneca tells us, that

that Auguſtus gaviſus ſibi quod advocatum invenerat, uxori quidem gratias egit. Upon the whole, the tragedy of Cinna, exceptionable as it may be, muſt be allowed to be leſs diſguſting to a liberal mind, than the vulgar dialogue of carpenters and coblers in the Julius Cæſar of Shakeſpear, or the chopt hands, greaſy night-caps, and ſtinking breaths, ſo minutely deſcribed by Caſca; indecorums for which the many brilliant and ſublime paſſages in the ſame play by no means ſufficiently atone.

It is a remark of the ſame critic,* that nothing ſo deeply ſtains the human character as ingratitude, and that Emilia muſt therefore appear odious to the ſpectator. If ſo, I

* Ibid. p. 220.

am afraid it will be found that Brutus muſt appear in the ſame light, for Anthony in his ſpeech to the plebeians thus mentions him;

Thro' this the well-beloved Brutus ſtabb'd,
For Brutus as you know was Cæſar's angel.
Judge, oh you gods! how dearly Cæſar lov'd him!

Shakeſpear in this point was undoubtedly in an error, for it was not Marcus Brutus, but Decimus Brutus that was Cæſar's favourite, as may be ſeen in Cicero's Phillip. 10; however we muſt take the character as the poet gives it us, and then I will venture to pronounce, that if Emilia is odious to the ſpectator, Brutus muſt appear equally ſo, and for the ſame reaſons; unleſs it be proved, and it will be no eaſy matter ſo to do, that the deſire of reſtoring

ing liberty to ones country is more natural to man, than the deſire of revenging the death of a beloved father is to the female heart.

The principal fault in the Horace, ſeems to be the double action; the piece ought to conclude with the victory over the Curiatii, inſtead of which, a new ſubject is ſtarted in the death of Camilla. Beſides, the fifth act, which ought to be the moſt animated and intereſting, is the leaſt ſo of any, as it conſiſts of ſtudied ſpeeches, and tedious declamations, ill ſuited to the ſituations of the perſons repreſented. The qu'il mourût of the old Horatius is too well known to need any further commendations; pity it is that the force of it ſhould be weakened by the ſubſequent lines; had they

been omitted, I know not where could be found a ſentiment of ſo much dignity and ſo truly Roman.

No objection can be made to the ingenious critic's remarks* on the tragedy of Rodogune. It certainly opens badly, and there are many faults in the conduct of the piece: but if fine paſſages can make amends for the abſurdities in Shakeſpear, the ſame may be urged as a plea in defence of this tragedy.

In Polyeucte, the converſions of Pauline and Felix are too ſudden and miraculous; nor is the cauſe of chriſtianity honoured by the acceſſion of a member ſo contemptible as Felix. If the ſtyle of this play is leſs lofty and heroic than in Cinna,

* Ibid. p. 125.

Cinna, Rodogune, and ſome others, it is at the ſame time leſs turgid and bombaſt, and perhaps pleaſes more, as it aims at touching the heart, and affecting the paſſions; a point which the impartial reader will acknowledge it does not fail to accompliſh. It has been obſerved that it is a common error in the plan of Corneille's tragedies, that the intereſt of the piece generally turns upon ſome unknown perſon. Is Cinna then unknown? conſult Seneca. Are the Horatii unknown? conſult Livy. Is Rodogune unknown? conſult Appian and Juſtin. Is Polyeucte unknown? conſult the Roman martyrology. Surely we are as well acquainted with the characters in theſe plays, as with thoſe in Othello, Romeo, Hamlet, or Macbeth; the two

former exiſting in wild noveliſts, the two latter handed down to us in antiquated worm-eaten chronicles.

To criticiſe all the tragedies of Corneille would be a taſk equally tedious and unprofitable; let it be ſufficient to obſerve, that as they are more regular than thoſe pieces of Shakeſpear, which paſs under the ſame denomination, ſo have they likewiſe a greater air of credibility, and are more capable of inſpiring that agreeable deluſion, by which we fancy ourſelves ſpectators of the real miſeries, and auditors of the real ſentiments of virtuous and exalted perſonages. By ſuch repreſentations it is that we are conſtrained to drop the ſympathetic tear at the ſad tale of woe, or taught to

to feel no inconſiderable ſhare of happineſs at the ſucceſs and triumphs of honour and integrity. Conſidered therefore as tragedies we muſt allow them, though perhaps unwillingly, to be ſuperior to Shakeſpear's; but call them by any other appellation, and there is an end of all compariſon. Corneille gives to the perſons of his dramas but few diſcriminating marks of character; his heroes are moſtly lovers or politicians; his heroines haughty and arrogant, and they too generally in love: but our Engliſh poet will be found to aſſume any ſhape at will, and in whatever figure, whatever dreſs he may appear, it will ſit eaſy on him, it will ſeem natural to him, and it will conſequently ſatisfy and delight.

Talis in æterno felix Vertumnus Olympo
Mille habet ornatus mille decenter habet.

Tibull. lib. 4.

ON

ON

RACINE,

FOR elegance, correctneſs, harmony of verſe and beauty of ſentiment, Racine has hitherto remained without a rival. Unequal to Corneille in majeſty and ſublimity of ſtyle, but far his ſuperior in the tender and pathetic, and much more intelligent in the art of moving the paſſions and captivating the heart. Love is the prevailing ſubject of moſt of his pieces; which he repreſents in a variety of ſituations, in ſuch as intereſt, pleaſe, intimidate, or inſtruct. But here the critic, who is uſed to the clangor of trumpets, the claſh of arms, and the

the hurly-burly of the Engliſh theatre, will be apt to exclaim, that this is the leaſt theatrical of all the paſſions; and that by ſuch means the tragic heroes degenerate into the whining lovers of romance. It may not therefore be improper to enquire if love is a fit ſubject for the ſtage, or not. I would therefore aſk, is love an unnatural paſſion? certainly not. Is it not a duty incumbent on the tragedian to copy nature in its influence over the heart and actions of man? moſt undoubtedly it is. May not love be placed in ſuch circumſtances as to pleaſe, may it not in its conſequences convey leſſons of morality and inſtruction? unqueſtionably. As long therefore as it ſhall remain the duty of the tragic poet to pleaſe and inſtruct, by imitation of nature

and

and living manners, ſo long muſt love be acknowledged a proper ſubject for the drama. In fact, to baniſh love would be to baniſh nature. But it debaſes the characters of heroes.—Are heroes then to be inſenſible alike to the charms of beauty and merit, or need they be repreſented like Hercules ſpinning at the feet of their miſtreſſes? Magnanimity and tenderneſs are in no wiſe incompatible, nor to be brave is it neceſſary to be brutal. The gread Condé was obſerved to drop tears at a tragedy of Corneille's, but they were tears that argued a ſenſibility, not a weakneſs of ſoul; they were tears that became the hero, and did honour to the man. Let it not be urged that by preſenting ſcenes of love, it will become contagious, and infect the hearts of the audience

audience with imbecillity and cowardice. Perhaps it might in ſome meaſure ſmooth and wear off the rough edge of ferocity common to all northern nations; but it does not follow that it would enervate the ſpirit of martial ardour, or ſink true courage into puſillanimity. It might on the contrary add ſtrength and vigour to military virtue; for then the warrior would have an additional incitement to glory: he would fight not only for his country but for his miſtreſs, who to every laurel that bound her hero's brow, would add with an air of approbation and mutual triumph the chaplet of myrtle;

And to his honours and his valiant parts
Would ſhe her ſoul and fortune conſecrate.
Othello.

To

To ſay that love is the leaſt theatrical of all the paſſions, is to know but little of human nature. Does not love inſpire the weak and timid with perſeverance and fortitude? Does it not make cowards of the brave? Does it not humiliate the haughty, and elevate the diffident? Preys it not upon the mind with doubt, hope, fear? Does it not pine with deſpair? Is it not racked with jealouſy? Does it not lead to madneſs? Does it not inſtigate to revenge, to murder? Its effects are too many to enumerate in full, and the ſituations, in which it may be repreſented, ſo various, that of all others it ſeems to be the paſſion the beſt adapted to the ſtage. But although the ſubject in itſelf be good, it may be perverted to bad or ridiculous ends. The French have undoubtedly

undoubtedly erred in the latter particular, and their points, conceits, and forced language, have afforded a large field for the puiſſant knights in criticiſm to ſhew their prowefs in. Philoctetes and Jocaſta, Theſeus and Dircè, and the old Sertorius are lawful plunder, and as ſuch ſhould be left to be ſtripped by thoſe, who think it worth their while to do ſo. The addreſs of Pymante to the bodkin of his miſtreſs in the Clitandre of Corneille, is quoted by a certain author * as highly ridiculous; and a paragon of abſurdity moſt undoubtedly it is, perhaps not to be equalled, except by the ſame author's favourite and matchleſs poet. Let us hear what Romeo ſays of Juliet:

* Vide Remarks on the writings and genius of Shakeſpear.

I am too bold, 'tis not to me ſhe ſpeaks:
Two of the faireſt ſtars of all the heav'n
Having ſome buſineſs, do intreat her eyes
To twinkle in their ſpheres, till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightneſs of her cheek would ſhame thoſe ſtars,
As day-light doth a lamp; her eyes in heav'n
Would thro' the airy region ſtream ſo bright,
That birds would ſing, and think it were not night.

What Galamathias is this! Two ſtars having ſome buſineſs. How abſurd the idea, how low, how vulgar the expreſſion!

What if her eyes were there, they in her head,

A pretty ſuppoſition indeed! but what then? why,

The brightneſs of her cheek would ſhame thoſe ſtars,
As day-light doth a lamp; her eyes in heav'n
Would

Would thro' the airy region ſtream ſo bright,
That birds would ſing, and think it were not
night.

Happy, thrice happy country, in which ſuch Juliets abound! Should the ſun withdraw his rays, the fair one has nothing to do but to permit her eyes to twinkle in heaven, and the cheerleſs gloom of ſullen wintry days would be immediately diſpelled. No more would the valetudinarian's ſpirits riſe or fall with the weather-glaſs, or his nerves tremble at the paſſage of each cloud; nor would the Engliſh, whilſt in poſſeſſion of ſuch Juliets, be remarkable for hanging or drowning themſelves in the no longer melancholy month of November. Then, though with an abſurdity equal to Romeo's, we ſhould talk of our love, and call it

A heavy lightneſs, ſerious vanity,
Miſshapen chaos of well ſeeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright ſmoke, cold fire, ſick health,
Still-waking ſleep, that is not what it is,

and felt, if it were poſſible, in full force, what he ſo marvellouſly deſcribes; yet whilſt we beheld all nature chearful and ſmiling around us, we ſhould not perhaps loath life, or ſeek a lover's leap to terminate our unhappy beings.

Shakeſpear's Juliet is an exact counterpart to his Romeo, and her ideas caſt in the ſame mould: hear what ſhe ſays;

Give me my Romeo; and when he ſhall die,
Take him and cut him out in little ſtars,
And he will make the face of heav'n ſo fine,
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worſhip to the gariſh ſun.

In another place ſhe calls him,

Beautiful tyrant, fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven, wolviſh-ravening lamb.

Whilſt we can hear with patience ſuch extravagant conceits as theſe, let us ſhew an equal degree of toleration to thoſe of other nations; nor reject nonſenſe merely becauſe it is not of our own growth.

Whoever is acquainted with the Andromaque of Racine will acknowledge, that love in the breaſt of an Hermione is capable of producing the moſt tragical events; and the bad conſequences of its being perverted to improper purpoſes, are painted in the moſt ſtriking colours in the deſpair of Hermione and the madneſs of Oreſtes. Nor can it be

be ſaid, that love ſo repreſented can be infectious or ſeductive; on the contrary, we are taught by ſuch examples to reſiſt it in its infancy, leſt it gain the maſtery over us, and involve us in the miſeries delineated by the French poet.

The tragedy of Iphigenie has been deſervedly celebrated, and admired by all who read and judge with candour and impartiality; yet this excellent compoſition has fallen under the ſevere laſh of the critic: by whom we are told, that in the tragedy of Hecuba by Euripides, when Ulyſſes comes to demand Polyxena to be ſacrificed, his conduct is admirably ſuited to our conceptions of him: that he is cold, prudent, deaf to pity, blind to beauty, and to be moved only by conſideration of the

public weal; but that in the Iphigenie there appears nothing of Ulyſſes upon the ſtage but his name. * To prove this we are referred to part of his ſpeech, Je ſuis prêt de pleurer, which is tranſlated, I am ready to cry, and printed in italics, with a view I ſuppoſe of marking it as ridiculous. In the Engliſh, as well as in other languages, there are many expreſſions that ſignify the ſame thing; and it is no difficult matter to ſubſtitue one ſynonimous word in the room of another, and by ſuch means to give an appearance of abſurdity to what is in reality pertinent and juſt. If therefore we take the proper word, *weep*, inſtead of the ſynonimous but vulgar word, *cry*, we ſhall

* Vide Remarks on the writing and genius of Shakeſpear, p. 46.

ſhall no longer find any impropriety of expreſſion. The following are the lines alluded to;

Je ſuis pere, ſeigneur, et foible comme un autre,
Mon cœur ſe met ſans peine, en la place du votre;
Et frémiſſant du coup qui vous fait ſoupirer,
Loin de blâmer vos pleurs, je ſuis prêt de pleurer.

which in a faithful and plain tranſlation are as follow: I am a father, and have the feelings of one, my heart eaſily places itſelf in the ſituation of yours, and ſhuddering at the ſtroke which occaſions your grief, far from blaming your tears, I too am ready to weep. Wherein conſiſts the abſurdity of this ſpeech? Wherein is it repugnant to the gravity of the tragic muſe? But, ſays the critic, it is inconſiſtent with the

character of Ulysses, for Euripides represents him as cold and deaf to pity. But I will on the contrary, venture to affirm, that Euripides does not make him insensible to the feelings and compunctions of humanity; and as a proof of the truth of my assertion take the following speech of Ulysses:

Αλις κόρης σῆς θανατος, ὑ Προσοιζεος
Αλλος πρὸς ἄλλω· μηδὲ τόνδ' ὀφειλομεν.

Satis puellæ tuæ mors, non addenda
Alia ad aliam: utinam nec hanc deberemus.

The μηδὲ τόνδ' ὀφειλομεν of Euripides is equal, or nearly equal, allowing for the different modes of expression peculiar to each language, to the Loin de blâmer vos pleurs je suis prêt de pleurer of the French poet, and clearly evinces that Ulysses did commiserate the unhappy daughter of

of Hecuba. And further, Polyxena ſays in the ſame ſcene,

Ορω σ' Οδυσσευ δεξιὰν ὑφ' ἱματος
Κρύπτοντα χεῖρα, κ᾽ Πρόσωπον ἔμπαλιν
Στρεφοντα, μή σε προσθίγω γενειάδος.

Video te, o Ulyſſes, dextram ſub veſte
Occultantem manum, et faciem retrorſum
Vertentem, ne tuum attingam mentum.

Now why ſhould he hide his hand under his robe, but to prevent her from preſſing it; or why turn aſide his face, but to avoid her touching it; leaſt moved as he already was with compaſſion for her, he ſhould be too much wrought upon by ſuch prevailing blandiſhments. It is evident that Polyxena ſaw by ſuch precautions, that he was already affected, and therefore ſhe immediately adds,

Θάρσει; πεφευγας τὸν ἐμὸν Ικέσιον Δια;

which means, as the ſcholiaſt remarks, ἐκπέφευγας τὴν ἐμὴν μετριαν, take courage, you have avoided my ſupplication; in other words, I do not mean to ſolicit your mercy.

The ſame critic obſerves, that there is no reſemblance between the French and Greek Achilles but in name. * It is certain they appear in ſomewhat different lights, for their ſituations are different: in Euripides he is ſuppoſed not to have ſeen Iphigenia, previous to the opening of the play; in Racine he has ſeen and is in love with her. How far Racine may be juſtified in thus repreſenting him, I will not pretend to determine; but in other reſpects I maintain he reſembles Achilles, not only in name, but in diſpoſition.

* P. 46.

diſpoſition. Let us take his character from Horace, and ſee if we cannot find ſome traces of it in Racine.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,
Jura neget ſibi nata, nihil non arroget armis.

Tranſporté d'une ardeur qui ne peut être oiſive,
Je rejoindrai bientôt les Grecs ſur cette rive.
J'aurois trop de regret, ſi quelqu' autre guerrier
Au rivage Troyen deſcendoit le premier.

And again,

— puiſqu'il faut enfin que j'arrive au tombeau,
Voudrois-je de la terre inutile fardeau,
Trop avare d'un ſang reçu d'une déeſſe,
Attendre chez mon pere une obſcure vieilleſſe;
Et toujours de la gloire évitant le ſentier,
Ne laiſſer aucun nom, et mourir tout entier?
Ah, ne nous formons point ces indignes obſtacles!
L'honneur parle, il ſuffit, ce ſont la nos oracles.

Les

Les dieux ſont de nós jours les maîtres ſouverains ;
Mais, ſeigneur, notre gloire eſt dans nos propres mains.
Pourquoi nous tourmenter de leurs ordres ſuprêmes ?
Ne ſongeons qu' à nous rendre immortels comme eux mêmes.
Et laiſſant faire au ſort, courons on la valeur
Nous promet un deſtin auſſi grand que le leur.

Do theſe lines give us no idea of the impiger Achilles ? In the ſixth ſcene of the fourth act we find ſeveral marks of the iracundus Achilles, and in the laſt act he delivers himſelf thus,

Une juſte fureur s'empare de mon ame,
Vous allez à l'autel, et moi j'y cours, madame.
Si de ſang et de morts le ciel eſt affamé
Jamais de plus de ſang ſes autels n'ont fumé :
A mon aveugle amour tout ſera légitime.
Le prêtre deviendra la premiere victime.

Le

Le bucher, par mes mains détruit et renverſé,
Dans le ſang des bourreaux nagera diſperſé.
Et ſi dans les horreurs de ce deſordre extrême,
Votre pere frappé tombe et périt lui-même,
Alors de vos reſpects voyant les triſtes fruits,
Reconnoiſſez les coups, que vous aurez conduits.

Here in defiance of the laws of his religion, he purpoſes to violate the ſanctity of the altar, to ſpare neither the prieſt nor Agamemnon, but by force of arms to reſcue his Iphigenia :

Jura negat ſibi nata, nihil non arrogat armis.

Let me aſk thoſe, who are ſo ready to pardon Shakeſpear for his neglect of the unities, and to condemn the French tragedians for not adhering faithfully to hiſtorical characters, whether it is not more probable, that Grecians or Romans

Romans might on ſome occaſions talk, and act like Frenchmen, than that Fortinbras ſhould appear at this inſtant in Denmark, and in an hour and a half return victorious from Poland; or that Othello ſhould at one time be in Venice, and preſently afterwards arrive at Cyprus? Theſe are impoſitions on our ſenſes, the other on our knowledge of hiſtory only: the one too groſs to eſcape the obſervation of the moſt ignorant, the other to be diſcovered by thoſe only, who are not unacquainted with antient manners. If therefore we are unwilling to condemn an author, who has exceeded the bounds of poſſibility, why ſhould we refuſe our indulgence to faults of a much more venial nature? Why ſhould we not pardon an author, though he be not an Engliſhman, becauſe

becauſe he has given more tender-neſs and ſenſibility to a Grecian or a Roman, than is conſiſtent with hiſtorical truth: nay, though he ſhould in a few inſtances have put into their mouths an ill-timed declamation, a flighty love-ſpeech, or even a witticiſm, or a conceit? Have not the lords of empires been compaſſionate and humane, have they not been men of gallantry and intrigue, and was not the greateſt orator of Rome on ſome occaſions a diſeur de bons mots? As in a tragedy, meant for repreſentation, it is the wiſh and intention of the author that it ſhould, not only inſtruct, but *pleaſe*; under ſuch a circumſtance, and upon ſuch a conſideration, I muſt, for my own part, acquit him of any heinous offence, if he ſhould repreſent the perſonages

of

of his drama differing in manners from ſuch as hiſtory has aſcribed to them. For let a tragedy of Æſchylus, Sophocles, or Euripides, without any alteration in the plan, incidents, cataſtrophe, characters, and ſentiments, appear on a modern theatre, I am confident it would not meet with ſucceſs; and that if any indulgence were ſhewn to it, it would be owing to the excellence of the performers, and not of the piece itſelf.

But if the Achilles of Racine is not like the Greek Achilles, who does the Hector of Shakeſpear repreſent? certainly he is not the Hector of Homer, for it was not poſſible for him to quote Ariſtotle. Titus Lartius and Menenius Agrippa, as repreſented by Shakeſpear,

can

can never be the two Romans of thoſe names in the time of Coriolanus; for the former could not poſſibly have mentioned Cato, nor the other Alexander and Galen. Yet Shakeſpear, according to the critic, * muſt be allowed to ſurpaſs all dramatic writers in delineating characters, and even Homer himſelf. Theſe inacuracies and anachroniſms cannot be imputed to any interpolations, for we find in the Midſummer Night's Dream the Grecian Theſeus, and a tribe of Gothic fairies and ſprites, beſides a rabble of low mechanics; who if they are ſuppoſed to be Engliſh have no buſineſs at Athens, and if Athenians have no buſineſs to talk of French crowns. The truth is, that he, as well as other writers, who deviate from the real

* Ibid. p. 20.

real characters they mean to preſent to us, are in ſome degree reprehenſible for ſo doing: at the ſame time I am inclined to believe, that as neither Engliſh nor French can transform themſelves into Grecians or Romans, nor totally diveſt themſelves of notions and ſentiments peculiar to their ſeveral methods of education and life, let them write in any language whatever, they will naturally, I had almoſt ſaid unavoidably, transfuſe into the manners of their dramatic characters a tincture of their own: the Engliſhman will betray himſelf in a Brutus, the Frenchman in a Mark Anthony. Upon which account the domeſtic is by many preferred to the heroic tragedy. In the compoſition of the one the poet is to ſeek his characters in the page of hiſtory,

hiſtory, in the other he copies from real life: in the one he takes upon credit, in the other he deſcribes what he ſees and knows: in the one he preſents to the ſpectator perſons, with whom he is perhaps wholly unacquainted, in the other he places before him his countrymen, his friends, his parents: the one are the objects of admiration and reverence, the others of love, hope, fear, and pity. The hero in diſtreſs is beholden with calm and compoſed concern, but the man of miſery and anguiſh excites the moſt compaſſionate ſympathy; it is a brother, it is a ſecond ſelf that extorts our tears; to whom we ſeem ready to unfold our arms, to ſhelter and protect him even at the hazard of our own lives. The moral conveyed by either may be equally good, but

by no means equally forcible: the exalted characters of heroic tragedy are of a ſuperior nature to the generality of mankind, and therefore are not objects of imitation: the crimes of tyranny cannot be perpetrated by many, the puniſhment attendant on ſuch crimes cannot therefore terrify or deter from vice the villain in common life: he ſees no reſemblance between the purple tyrant and the midnight aſſaſſin, no analogy between the daring exceſſes of ambition and the ſecret abandoned courſe of an evil diſpoſition, between the reſentment of an oppreſſed people and the ſeverity of injured laws. There is moreover on the ſide of domeſtic tragedy a greater ſemblance of probability, a more ſtriking imitation of real life; and the nearer the action of

the

the drama approaches to veriſimilitude, the more will the ſpectator be intereſted and moved. This is a truth ſo evident, as to require no demonſtration; and a truth it will ever remain, notwithſtanding certain critics, miſled by a partiality for a favourite author, have advanced a doctrine that tends to the ſubverſion of it: a doctrine, which unbiaſſed reaſon and mature reflection will ever reject as frivolous and abſurd.

I ſhould exceed the limits I have preſcribed to myſelf, were I to enter into a detail of all the various beauties in the tragedy of Iphigenie, but I cannot leave it without citing part of the ſecond ſcene in the ſecond act, which paſſes between Agamemnon and his daughter, who is as yet ignorant that ſhe is to be

ſacrificed to the gods, to render them propitious to the Greeks.

IPHIGENIE.

N'éclaircirez-vous point ce front chargé d'ennui ?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah, ma fille !

IPHIGENIE.

Seigneur pourſuivez.

AGAMEMNON.

Je ne puis.

IPHIGENIE.

Périſſe le Troyen auteur de nos allarmes !

AGAMEMNON.

Sa perte à ſes vainqueurs coûtera bien des larmes.

IPHIGENIE.

Les Dieux daignent ſurtout prendre ſoin de vos jours !

AGAMEMNON.

Les Dieux, depuis un temps, me ſont cruels et ſourds.

IPHIGENIE.

Calchas, dit-on, prépare un pompeux ſacrifice.

AGAMEMNON.

Puiſſai-je auparavant fléchir leur injuſtice !

IPHIGENIE.

IPHIGENIE.

L'offrira-t-on bien tôt?

AGAMEMNON.

. Plutôt que je ne veux.

IPHIGENIE.

Me ſera-t-il permis de me joindre à vos vœux,
Verra-t-on à l'autel votre heureuſe famille?

AGAMEMNON.

Helas!

IPHIGENIE.

Vous vous taiſez?

AGAMEMNON.

Vous y ſerez, ma fille.

If any one ſhould remain unaffected with this ſcene, and particularly with the concluding words of Agamemnon, let him not aſk, in what is it intereſting? where is the pathetic? let him not ſay that theſe are

— verſus inopes rerum nugæque canoræ,

let him rather clap his hand on his heart, and he will find it cold, callous, and obdurate.

The tragedy of Athalia is a maſter-piece of dramatic compoſition: in it are united ſublimity of thought, harmony of verſe, characters of the moſt exalted kind, and the raſh fury of inſolence and wickedneſs oppoſed to the bold unſhaken ſpirit of conſcious virtue and religious zeal. The choruſſes are ſo adapted to, and interwoven with the piece, as to ſeem neceſſary to it: and throughout the whole tragedy not a ſingle love-ſpeech can be found to offend the faſtidious critic.

ON

ON

VOLTAIRE.

IF Corneille and Racine greatly reformed and improved the French drama, Voltaire ſeems to have brought it to the greateſt degree of perfection to which it is capable of being raiſed. With a due obſervance of dramatic laws, with a thorough knowledge of the force and powers of poetry, with a taſte perhaps unequalled, and a genius ſuperior to moſt men, he has boldly, but judiciouſly, dared to make innovations on the French theatre, and to ſtrike out for himſelf a path to fame and immortality, unknown to, or at leaſt untrodden

by any of his predeceſſors. In his early years he wrote his tragedy of Oedipus, in which, to comply with the actors, who otherwiſe refuſed to perform it, he was prevailed upon to introduce ſome love-ſcenes, which in his own opinion were extremely miſplaced, and ſpoiled the whole. But whatever errors of that kind his youth and compliance with the falſe taſte of the age might have led him into, he ſoon ſaw, acknowledged, and amended them: and in his ſubſequent pieces love was not permitted to intrude itſelf in an improper place, though he had too great a knowledge of nature and the human heart, to baniſh it entirely from the ſtage. Several of his tragedies, ſuch as Zara, Merope, Mahomet, the Orphan of China, and others are tranſ-

lated

lated into Engliſh, and have been, and are ſtill repreſented on our theatres with a degree of approbation and applauſe, that does honour to the merit of the author and to the feelings of a Britiſh audience. * From theſe compoſitions we may learn, that a French tragedy is not a tiſſue of declamations and laboured recitals of the cataſtrophe, but an animated action, in which ſublimity of thought, beauty of ſentiment, and harmony of ſtyle, added to the intereſting and critical ſituation of the perſons repreſented, do not fail to excite the ſtrongeſt emotions that terror,

* I do not reckon the Scythians, which is tranſlated under the title of Zobeide; for the author declares himſelf, that he does not give it to the theatre, becauſe he is conſcious of its many imperfections; and preſents it to the reader only as a weak ſketch, which ſome more able hand may finiſh.

terror and pity are capable of inſpiring.

It was the cuſtom in France for many of the ſpectators to place themſelves on the ſtage, which, beſides the impropriety of it, was a great impediment to the actors, and deprived the author of the additional advantages to his piece of ſcenery and decorations. The reformation of this abuſe was owing to the tragedy of Semiramis; and as this play gained our author great reputation, and gave him an opportunity of introducing machinery, 'till then unknown on the French theatre, the reader will not perhaps be diſpleaſed if I ſhould endeavour to point out ſome of its beauties and defects.

The

The firſt ſcene opens between Arſace and his friend Mitrane; the former of whom is juſt arrived from the plains of Arbazan, where he had ſignalized himſelf by many victories, and from whence he came at the expreſs order of Semiramis. Arſace at a diſtance from Babylon, and truſting to common report, expects to find Semiramis in the height of happineſs as well as glory; but is informed of his miſtaken opinion by Mitrane; who repreſents her, as a prey to inward grief, and frequently retiring to the tomb of Ninus, which

Elle approche à pas lents, l'air ſombre intimidé,
Et ſe frappant le ſein de ſes pleurs inondé;
A travers les horreurs d'un ſilence farouche
Les noms de fils, d'epoux échappent de ſa bouche.

Hence

Hence we are prepared to ſee her in the ſituation in which ſhe afterwards appears, without being too ſoon acquainted with the cauſe of her anxiety. Mitrane dates this great change in her from the time ſhe ſent for Arſace; when Babylon was celebrating his conqueſts, and rejoicing at the arrival of Azema, whom he had delivered from the hands of the Scythians. Upon the mention of her name Arſace immediately ſays,

Azema n'a point part à ce trouble odieux ;
Un ſeul de ſes regards adouciroit les Dieux.

From the laſt line we at once conclude that Azema is the object of his affections; yet ſurely this expreſſion is much too hyperbolic, and ſavours more of the lover in romance, than of the ingenuous and rude

rude warrior; for ſo he deſcribes himſelf.

Pardonnez, un ſoldat eſt mauvais courtiſan.
Nourri dans la Scythie, aux plains d'Arbazan,
J'ai pu ſervir la cour et non pas la connaitre.

Arſace being left alone expreſſes his ignorance of the purpoſes to which the will of the gods deſtine him; and in the midſt of his ſoliloquy he is interrupted by groans from the tomb of Ninus, which is repreſented on one ſide of the ſtage. Thus it is that our author prepares his audience againſt the appearance of the ghoſt, a præternatural agent, that had as yet never been introduced on the French ſtage. Aſſur behaves with all the haughtineſs and inſolence, that we may ſuppoſe a man might adopt, who had been inſtrumental in promoting the deſigns of

Semiramis,

Semiramis, and who preſumed upon his ſervices; ſervices of the moſt black and criminal nature, and ſuch as he knew muſt bind her to ſecrecy, and in ſome meaſure dependance on him. We may eaſily conceive that Arſace of a noble ſpirit, of tried courage and fortitude, would not ſubmit to cringe before the imperious Aſſur: and he is led to treat him with leſs reſerve and reſpect, than he might otherwiſe have done, from ſome reflections of the high prieſt, who exclaims upon Aſſur's appearing,

A qui, Dieu tout-puiſſant, donnez vous les grandeurs?
O monſtre!

In the next ſcene we find Semiramis ſinking beneath the weight of her afflictions and remorſe for the murder

der of her huſband Ninus, yet comforting herſelf at the arrival of Arſace; in whom ſhe hopes to find ſome alleviation of her diſtreſsful ſituation by oppoſing him to Aſſur; of whom ſhe ſays,

Je frémis quand il faut menager mon complice.
Rougir devant ſes yeux eſt mon premier ſupplice;
Et je déteſte en lui cet avantage affreux,
Que lui donne un forfait, qui nous unit tous deux.

Weak as ſuch a conſolation is, it ſeems to ſuggeſt itſelf naturally to a perſon in her circumſtances; and ſerves to ſhew to what ſtreights the guilty are reduced, and that to be criminal is to be unhappy. Semiramis, unwilling to unboſom the real cauſe of her grief to the high prieſt, ſends to conſult the oracle of

Jupiter

Jupiter in Libya, and receives an anſwer couched in the ambiguous terms uſual on ſuch occaſions, and which ſhe, as frequently happened, interpreted in a wrong ſenſe.

In the opening of the third act, Semiramis reveals to Otane her deſign of taking Arſace to be the partner of her bed and empire. This diſcovery of her choice ſeems unneceſſary and premature: had this ſcene been wholly omitted, and the audience not appriſed of her reſolution, the choice of Arſace afterwards in the preſence of her court would have been much more ſtriking, and the coup de theatre more forcible and grand. Upon her naming Arſace it thunders, the tomb of Ninus is ſhaken, and his ghoſt

ghoſt ſtalks forth from it, Semiramis thus addreſſes it.

—— Veux-tu me perdre, ou veux-tu pardonner ?
C'eſt ton ſceptre et ton lit que je viens de donner ;
Juge ſi ce heros eſt digne de la place.
Prononce, j'y conſens.

L'Ombre a ARSACE.

Tu regneras, Arſace ;
Mais il eſt des forfaits que tu dois expier.
Dans ma tombe à ma cendre il faut ſacrifier ;
Sers et mon fils et moi ; ſouviens-toi de ton pere :
Ecoute le Pontife.

ARSACE.

— Ombre, que je révere,
Demi Dieu, dont l'eſprit anime ces climats,
Ton aſpect m'encourage et ne m'étonne pas.
Oui, j'irai dans ta tombe au peril de ma vie.
Acheve, que veux-tu que ma main ſacrifie ?
Il s'éloigne, il nous fuit.

SEMIRAMIS.

Ombre de mon epoux,
Permets qu'en ce tombeau j'embraſſe tes genoux,
Que mes regrets.—

L'ombre.

Arrête et reſpecte ma cendre,
Quand il en ſera tems, je t'y ferai deſcendre.

The ghoſt then enters the mauſoleum, and it immediately ſhuts.

In the fourth act Oroes the high prieſt, after placing the crown of Ninus on the head of Arſace, and arming him with his ſword likewiſe, informs him that Ninus was murdered by Aſſur, and that Semiramis was privy to his death, which was affected by poiſon, and that he too was poiſoned by Aſſur, but recovered by the art of Phradates, whom he had hitherto regarded as his father. Ninus when dying wrote to Phradates, and the letter is produced to confirm the guilt of Semiramis. The act concludes with an incomparable ſcene between Semiramis and

and Ninias, now no longer Arſace; in which he at length diſcovers himſelf to be her ſon. Semiramis being informed that Aſſur intends to murder Ninias in the tomb of Ninus, enters it herſelf with an intention to defend her ſon, who being made acquainted with the treacherous deſign of Aſſur, and hearing that he is at that time concealed in the tomb, concludes that he is the victim deſtined to periſh by his hand, and that the manes of his father are to be thus appeaſed. Full of this confidence he ruſhes into the mauſoleum, and ſoon returns with his hands imbrued in the blood of the ſuppoſed Aſſur; who diſarmed, and in the cuſtody of the high prieſt, is one of the firſt objects that ſtrikes him. Semiramis then ſtaggars from the tomb wounded

and dying: ignorant of her aſſaſſin ſhe calls upon her ſon to revenge her death. Upon his diſcovering himſelf to have been, through a miſtake, her murderer, ſhe dies; after having acknowledged his innocence, her own guilt, and expreſſed her hopes that the marriage between her ſon and Azema would expiate and efface her crimes. And thus concludes this tragedy; which for the dignity of the ſtory, variety of incidents, propriety of characters, and greatneſs of the cataſtrophe, might alone reſcue the French ſtage from the unjuſt imputation of being a ſcene of idle declamation, politics, and amorous ditty. The intervention of the ghoſt is perfectly well adapted to the occaſion. Semiramis makes choice of Arſace for her huſband; it is then that appears

(and

(and what time more proper?) the ſhade of the deceaſed king, and interrupts the ſolemnization of an inceſtuous marriage.

Il vient montrer au jour des crimes impunis,
Des horreurs de l'inceſte il vient ſauver ſon fils.

Its appearance is ſhort, conſequently awful; were it to remain long on the ſtage we ſhould grow familiarized to it, our horror would ceaſe, and we ſhould behold it with as much indifference and complacency, as any perſonage of the drama; from an airy, myſterious, tremendous being it would degenerate into ſomething trivial and abſurd, and would rather move our riſibility and ridicule, than rivet our attention and appal our ſenſes. Its language is ſolemn, pointed, commanding, and

oracular. It is introduced with much greater reaſon and propriety than the ſhade of Darius in the Perſians of Æſchylus: like the ghoſt in Hamlet it comes to demand vengeance for crimes unexpiated.

Du ciel, quand il le faut, la juſtice ſuprême
Suſpend l'ordre éternel établi par lui-même,
Il permet à la mort d'interrompre ſes loix,
Pour l'effroi de la terre et l'example des rois.

The character of Semiramis is finely ſupported throughout the whole piece; and in the midſt of her troubles and grief, we find her continually diſcovering a noble dignity and impoſing ſpirit, ſuch as we might expect from a great, enterprizing, and victorious queen: to ſuch a diſpoſition the following ſentiments of hers are exactly correſponding and appoſite.

J'ai

J'ai nourri mes chagrins, ſans les manifeſter,
Ma peur m'a fait rougir. J'ai craint de con-
ſulter
Le mage révéré, que chérit Babylone,
D'avilir devant lui la majeſté du trone,
De montrer une fois, en préſence du ciel,
Semiramis tremblante aux regards d'un mortel.

The loves of Arſace and Azema are neither inſipid nor foreign to the ſubject; on the contrary in the laſt act Azema is very inſtrumental in bringing on the cataſtrophe, and it is by her means only that the treacherous deſign of Aſſur on the life of Arſace is diſcovered. Upon the whole, although there may be found a few exceptionable lines, yet they are greatly out-balanced by almoſt innumerable beauties; and whoever has ſeen the incomparable Mademoiſelle Dumeſnil in the part of Semiramis, cannot have wiſhed

for a more intereſting theatrical entertainment.

It has been obſerved, that the French tragedies are borrowed from the antients, and if they have any intrinſic value, they are indebted to the antients for it. * A perſon unacquainted with the French ſtage, would therefore naturally conclude, that the writers of that nation had never treated any modern ſubjects for the drama: let him peruſe the works of Voltaire only, and undeceive himſelf. He will find that the ſubjects of Zara, Alzira, Mahomet, the Orphan of China, le Duc de Foix, Adelaide de Gueſclin, and others, were neceſſarily unknown to the antients, and that the author has been able

— novos

* Vide remarks on the writings and genius Shakeſpear, p. 32.

—novos decerpere flores,
Inſignemque ſuo capiti petere inde coronam,
Unde priùs nulli velarunt tempora muſæ.
Lucretius, lib. 4.

It muſt be acknowledged, that the French tragic muſe is upon ſome occaſions indebted to the antients; is ſhe then to be rejected upon that account? Are we no longer to admire the works of Virgil, becauſe we know that he has imitated Homer in many paſſages, that he has formed the fourth book of his Æneid upon one of Apollonius Rhodius, that he has tranſcribed lines from Ennius, Lucretius, Varus, and copied thoughts from Accius, Pacuvius and others? Why are we to look upon the moſt antient writers, at preſent extant, as the only originals, whilſt it is probable that as many heroes were prior to Agamemnon, many poets were antecedent to Homer.

The

The fame of Voltaire, as a tragedian, has hitherto remained unimpeached, unleſs by the Abbé Deſfontaines, Freron, and a few of the ſame character: but let not the Engliſh wiſh to appear in ſuch unworthy company, nor endeavour to depreciate his merit, leaſt their cenſures ſhould prove as weak and ineffectual as the dart of Priam againſt the ſhield of Pyrrhus;

— rauco quod protinus ære repulſum,
Et ſummo clypei nequicquam umbone pependit.

Æneid, lib. 2.

Voltaire's tranſlations of paſſages in ſeveral of our Engliſh poets have been much condemned, and juſtly reprehenſible they frequently are. The fault principally objected to him is his ignorance of our language.

guage. He certainly has been miſtaken in the meaning of ſome of the authors he has undertaken to preſent in a French dreſs; but I cannot think that it is owing to an imperfect knowledge of the Engliſh tongue, that he has failed ſo much as a tranſlator: for he is, or rather was, much better verſed in it than many are willing to allow. His greateſt error ſeems to be, that he has tranſlated too literally: for there are many words, which, in one language may be noble and ſonorous, but, if rendered in another, would appear low and burleſque. There are words too, in room of which were we to ſubſtitute others, that are termed ſynonimous, yet we ſhould find it no eaſy matter to ſupply ſuch as ſhould anſwer the original ones in every reſpect.

reſpect. To give an inſtance from Shakeſpear.

The king would ſpeak with Cornwall, the dear father
Would with his daughter ſpeak, commands her ſervice.
Are they inform'd of this? — my breath and blood! —
Fiery? the fiery duke? tell the hot duke that —

Here we find the word *hot* uſed in the ſame ſenſe as *fiery*, and ſynonimous they are, as far as the nature of language will admit; yet certainly they are not equally forcible.

Fiery? the fiery duke?

What a ſtriking image of his perſon does this expreſſion convey; we ſee

ſee paſſion glowing in his cheek and fury flaſhing from his eye.

Tell the hot duke that —

What a falling off is here, and how unequal is this epithet to the foregoing one! This is deſcriptive only, the other not only deſcribes, but paints; it does not impart to the mind of the reader merely an idea of Cornwall; it places his very form before his eyes. Theſe are delicacies of language, to which but little attention is paid, but from whence numberleſs beauties might be derived: for to clothe a fine thought in ill-choſen words, is like placing a valuable painting in an improper light, in which the principal figures perhaps would not intirely loſe their effect, but in which the more minute beauties muſt neceſſarily be obſcured.

The

The greateſt difficulty in tranſlating ſeems to be, to adhere with fidelity to the meaning of the original, to retain as far as poſſible the very expreſſions of it, and to loſe at the ſame time no part of its dignity, energy, and ſpirit. But whilſt the modes of expreſſion are ſo various in different languages; whilſt there are words in one, which cannot be rendered in another; whilſt notions and ideas natural and noble in one nation are deemed forced and puerile in another; a reader, whoſe knowledge is confined to one language, muſt never expect to be able to form a perfect judgment of foreign writers, ancient or modern, from what are called tranſlations of their works. Beautiful and happy imitations, it is to be hoped, will never be wanting; but faithful and correct

correct copies, exact and genuine tranſlations do not exiſt, nor will the nature of languages admit of them.

I am therefore very ready to allow that Voltaire is a bad tranſlator; that the French in general, or any other people that you pleaſe, or all other nations if you will, are bad tranſlators: but muſt obſerve, that the French are by no means deſtitute of good imitators. As an inſtance of this truth, I ſhall beg leave to quote the following imitation of the Donec gratus eram of Horace. It is written by the duke de Nivernois, who ſometime ſince reſided in England as ambaſſador from the court of France. It breathes a tenderneſs peculiar to lovers, and a naïveté (a word which cannot

cannot be tranſlated) that is enchanting. As it is not in the hands of every body, I am perſuaded the reader will not be diſpleaſed at its inſertion.

HORACE et LYDIE.

HORACE.

Plus heureux qu'un Monarque au faîte des grandeurs,
J'ai vû mes jours dignes d'envie :
Tranquilles, ils couloient au gré de nos ardeurs ;
Vous m'aimiez, charmante Lydie.

LYDIE.

Que mes jours étoient beaux quand des ſoins les plus doux
Vous payiez ma flamme ſincere !
Vénus me regardoit avec des yeux jaloux ;
Chloé n'avoit pas ſu vous plaire.

HORACE.

Par ſon luth, par ſa voix organe des amours,
Chloé ſeule me paroît belle :
Si le deſtin jaloux veut épargner ſes jours,
Je donnerai les miens pour elle.

LYDIE.

LYDIE.

Le jeune Calaïs, plus beau que les amours,
Plaît ſeul à mon ame ravie :
Si le deſtin jaloux veut épargner ſes jours,
Je donnerai deux fois ma vie.

HORACE.

Quoi, ſi mes premiers feux ranimant leur ardeur
Etouffoient une amour fatale,
Si perdant pour jamais tous ſes droits ſur mon cœur,
Chloé vous laiſſoit ſans rivale. —

LYDIE.

Calaïs eſt charmant ; mais je n'aime que vous :
Ingrat, mon cœur vous juſtifie.
Heureuſe également, en des liens ſi doux,
De perdre ou de paſſer la vie !

ON THE

SOPHONISBA

OF

TRISSINO.

AS we are indebted to the Italians for the revival of moſt ſpecies of poetry, ſo do we owe to them the firſt tragedy that merits any degree of reputation and applauſe. Of this Triſſino was the author; a man of great rank, and profound learning, well ſkilled in architecture, and from whom the famous Palladio, who was in his ſervice, imbibed his knowledge of

the firſt principles of that ſcience, which he afterwards brought to ſuch perfection. As yet the ſway of mitred dulneſs and monaſtic ignorance had miſled and bewildered the greater part of the inhabitants of Europe, and checked the growth of ſcience in her infancy; ſcarce had ſhe as yet ſhone with a feeble ray even on her beloved Italy. It was then, however, that Triſſino aroſe to cheriſh and protect her: who, although he was ambaſſador and nuncio from the pope to the emperors Maximilian and Charles the fifth, although he was entruſted by them with the direction and management of affairs of weighty conſequence, yet did he not confine his attention to politics alone, but endeavoured by his own example to encourage and promote the

ſtudy

ſtudy and cultivation of letters. He was the firſt among the moderns who compoſed a regular epic poem unfettered with rhime. A paſſionate admirer of Homer, but without an equal genius, he has copied him even to a fault, following him in his minute details and exact deſcriptions of things, which in our days are of little or no conſequence. His poem, however, has the merit of being free from the points and conceits uſually objected againſt the Italian writers, particularly by thoſe who are content to give up numberleſs beauties on account of a few imperfections: ſuch is the effect of prejudice, ſuch is the unjuſt prepoſſeſſion of many; a prepoſſeſſion that owes its riſe either to a blind deference to others, or to ignorance that ſeeks to con-

ceal itſelf under the affectation of ſuperior knowledge and taſte, or to a narrow ſordid ſelf-love, that leads men to exalt the merit of their own countrymen in preference to foreign writers, and thus to gratify a ſelfiſh pride, and tacitly and obliquely commend themſelves.

In his tragedy of Sophoniſba, Triſſino has imitated the Grecian manner, both in the choruſſes and in the conduct of it. As to his character of Scipio, I am perſuaded the reader will not be leſs enamoured with his many virtues, as delineated by the Italian poet, than as they are handed down to us in the annals of hiſtory. Maſiniſſa appears with ſuitable dignity, and Sophoniſba is not the haughty, inſolent, unfeeling heroine of tragedy,

a character too common in many modern dramatic compoſitions; but a woman acquainted with misfortunes, ſenſible to and expreſſing the anguiſh of her heart. Much may be objected to the length of many of the ſpeeches, much to the unneceſſary minuteneſs of the deſcriptive parts, which weaken and impede the action: but it muſt be remembered, that it was not required of the Grecian, nor is it expected of the Italian tragedian, that he ſhould make the ſtage a ſcene of continual intrigue, nor that he ſhould perplex his audience with an intricate plot, or an aſſemblage of improbable incidents, nor uſe the coarſer method of exciting pity or terror by the reeking dagger of rattling chains. They wrote for a people whoſe whole frame was

ſuſceptible of the fineſt feelings, whoſe every nerve was alive to the moſt delicate ſenſibility. If any Engliſhman therefore ſhould expect to find, that Triſſino has ſtrewed the ſtage with dead bodies, and left only one alive to wind up the piece with a couplet or two, he will be greatly diſappointed. Sophoniſba is the only unhappy ſufferer; yet ſurely where youth, virtue, innocence, and beauty meet with an untimely fate, the tear of ſympathetic anguiſh will overflow, the meaſure of ſorrow will be complete.

It muſt be allowed, that the dialogue is ſometimes low; nothing can well be more laughable than the following lines in the mouth of Lelius:

Subito

Subito ne verro, ch'abbia vedute
Le Stalle, e che cavalli entro vi ſono.

Such a ſpeech might well ſuit a groom, but is very unbecoming the Roman general.

In peruſing the tragedy of Triſſino we are always to conſider, that it was not only the firſt written in Italian, but alſo, that it was the firſt written in any modern language; we are therefore bound in juſtice to make great allowances in its favour. It is true, that prior to it, there were certain theatrical repreſentations called tragedies, but it was a proſtitution of the name; as they were wild and extravagant productions, mere contemptible farces, without uniformity of deſign

or regularity of conduct; objections that can never be made to the Sophoniſba of Triſſino.

ON

ON THE

ROSMUNDA

OF

RUCCELLAI.

THE tragedy of Roſmunda appears to be an imitation of the Antigone of Sophocles, though it muſt be acknowledged it is but an imperfect copy; and the Italian can by no means be allowed to equal the Grecian poet, unleſs in the harmony of his verſe and the ſimplicity of his ſtyle. As the choruſſes do not treat of indifferent ſubjects, but ſuch only

as

as are connected with the piece, they may be ſaid to bear a part in the action; but the poet does not often break out into thoſe beautiful and animated figures of ſpeech ſo frequent in the choruſſes of the Greek theatre, and ſeems rather cautious of offending than ambitious of delighting his audience. The doctrine of Albuino in the tragedy before us is deteſtable, and could not be endured from any perſon but one of his character.

Chi vuol reggere imperi, ſtati, o regni
Gli biſogna eſſer ſopra ogn'altro crudo;
Perchè da crudeltà naſce 'l timore,
E dal timor l'ubbidienza naſce,
Per cui ſi regge e ſi governa il mondo.

The author ſeems to have exceeded the bounds of probability when he repreſents Albuino compelling Roſ-

munda

munda to drink out of the ſkull of her father: nor do I ſee any reaſon for making mention of ſuch an unparelleled ſpecies of barbarity, unleſs it be to place before the audience the character of Albuino in the moſt odious light. He has however prudently choſen to relate the fact rather than preſent it on the ſtage, and has wiſely obſerved the precept of Horace:

——multaque tolles
Ex oculis quæ mox narret facundia præſens.
De Arte poet.

The death of ſuch a monſter, at the ſame time that it ſerves to inculcate the comfortable doctrine, that puniſhment attends cruelty and injuſtice, cannot fail to be agreeable to the reader; who is not leſs pleaſed to find that the pious and amiable

amiable Roſmunda is made happy in her deliverance from tyranny and oppreſſion. The moral is therefore juſt, and the concluſion ſuch as is calculated to encourage the pleaſing belief, that virtue, though perſecuted for a time, will not fail to remove all obſtacles to happineſs, and challenge and receive its due reward.

I am well aware that the Engliſh critic will be apt to pronounce the tragedy before us, as well as the theatrical compoſitions in general of all ſouthern nations, inſipid, unintereſting, and unaffecting: but he would do well to conſider the different characters of nations, various as the climates they inhabit, warm and genial as the ſun that makes all nature ſmile around them,

or

or cold and barren, like the ſnow-capt mountains that environ them. What at Naples or at Rome would appal the heart with terror and diſmay, or convulſe it with all the agonizing throbs of pity and compaſſion, would, in the more impenetrable northern boſom, ſcarce excite the tranſitory ſhudder, or the feeble half-formed ſigh.

It may perhaps be aſked, how it happens that the modern Italians differ ſo widely from their anceſtors the Romans, who took ſuch delight in the barbarous ſhews of gladiators, and the expoſing their fellow-creatures to the fury of wild beaſts. To this it may be anſwered, that if they were cruel, it was owing originally to neceſſity rather than to their natural diſpoſitions; for

for being in their beginning but an inconſiderable number, they were conſtrained to live by violence and plunder. When they became more numerous, they likewiſe grew more formidable, and with their numbers their enemies increaſed. As they began by rapine, they continued by warfare; and whilſt the ſword remained unſheathed, the blood on it was regarded as a ſign of honour, and beholden with a degree of ſatisfaction and applauſe. As for the cruel combats of gladiators, they owed their riſe to a ſuperſtitious notion that prevailed among the Pagans, namely, that the manes of the dead were rendered propitious with human blood. To policy they owed their continuance; and in after ages theſe inhuman ſports were frequently exhibited to the

Romans,

Romans, to cheriſh in their boſoms a ferocity, that ſeemed eſſential to their aggrandizement, and to make them bravely act as well as boldly think. But when once the chriſtian religion prevailed, as it preached meekneſs and humility, ſo it checked and abated the impetuous ſpirit of military ardour; and the reformation of manners then became the attention of the ſovereigns, whoſe whole thoughts had been before engroſſed in adding new conqueſts to their domains by ravage and deſtruction. Their ſubjects too then applied themſelves to the cultivation of the duties of ſociety and domeſtic œconomy; and if they ſunk as heroes, they roſe as men. *

From

* It will be underſtood, that they are here conſidered as a nation, and not individually;

From hence then may be dated the æra of humanity amongſt the Romans: peace and tranquillity inſpired and promoted the tender affections amongſt them, as a ſtate of warfare and a deſire of conqueſt had hardened and brutalized their diſpoſitions. Politeneſs, according to the learned Monteſquieu, ‡ is found to prevail moſt in deſpotic governments; for there the inhabitants are not immerſed in politics, and have idle hours enough to dedicate to the leſs eſſential duties of urbanity and a deference to one another. In like manner we may venture to aſſert, that the ſocial virtues

vidually; for we know that ſome of the moſt exalted characters exiſted before this period; but we are not to form our ideas of a body from a few particular members of it.

‡ Eſprit des Loix, lib. xix. ch. 27.

virtues will be moſt cultivated by thoſe, to whom the laſting and uninterrupted enjoyment of peace gives opportunity and inclination to improve the mind and humanize the ſoul. But whilſt danger hovers over us, the deſire of ſelf-preſervation engroſſes our whole thoughts, commands and fixes our whole attention, and whilſt we are continually buſied in the defence of our houſhold gods, we have no leiſure to ſacrifice to the graces.

The Goths, by their irruptions, had indeed given a temporary change to the manners of the inhabitants of Italy, by the introduction of their own; but when once the tumults they had occaſioned ſubſided, and peace was again reſtored, literature was then revived; arts and

ſciences, for the comfort and embelliſhment of life, were then introduced, and with them their concomitant virtues, humanity and a regard for the wellfare of others. What eaſe and inactivity began, the warmth of climate accompliſhed; and a keen ſenſibility took place unknown to former ages. The modern Italians then became totally unlike their progenitor Fabricius, who, it is ſaid, could bear the moſt unexpected and terrifying objects without the leaſt ſhock or emotion *. The irritableneſs and delicate mobility of their nerves was conſiderably heightened and encreaſed, and the rough ſpirit of valour gave place to the finer feelings of ſympathetic tenderneſs. To this great revolution, it may be doubted,

* Vide Plutarch, in vitâ Pyrrhi.

doubted, whether the change in the political ſyſtem or of climate contributed moſt. That the climate of Italy is very much altered from what it was in former times, we have the ſtrongeſt reaſons to believe, if we compare the accounts given of it by antient writers, with the real ſtate of it at this day. Horace and Pliny frequently mention the ſeverity of the cold during the winter: Ælian teaches us the art of catching eels, when the rivers were frozen: and Virgil in his Georgicks, inſtructs his countrymen to protect their ſheep againſt the cold,

Incipiens ſtabulis edico in mollibus herbam
Carpere oves, dum mox frondoſa reducitur
æſtas;
Et multâ duram ſtipulâ filicumque maniplis

Sternere ſubter humum, glacies ne frigida lædat
Molle pecus, ſcabiemque ferat turpeſque podagras.

Georg. 3.

Speaking of the goats, a much hardier animal, he ſays,

Poſt hinc digreſſus jubeo frondentia capris
Arbuta ſufficere et fluvios præbere recentes;
Et ſtabula a ventis hyberno opponere ſoli
Ad medium converſa diem.

Ibid.

And concludes with this general precept in regard to them

Ergo omni ſtudio glaciem ventoſque nivales
Avertes.

Ibid.

At preſent all ſuch precautions are unneceſſary, the winters in general being

being extremely mild, excepting in the mountains, where, even to the ſouth of Naples, the cold is very intenſe: but we are not to ſuppoſe that Virgil meant his inſtructions for the benefit of the inhabitants of the upland countries only, for the text will not warrant ſuch a reſtriction.

From what has been already ſaid we may infer, that to determine the merit of the compoſitions of foreign nations, it is not ſufficient to be maſters of their languages, even in the moſt perfect degree; but to be competent judges of them, as it is not poſſible to poſſeſs their notions and ſenſations, we ſhould at leaſt experimentally know in what degree and on what occaſions they are moved and affected. Yet ſuch

is the ſelf-conceit of many a critic, that without any knowledge of their diſpoſitions, and whilſt he himſelf ſtruggles againſt the inclemency of ſeaſons by means of the exhilarating blaze or the convivial bowl, whilſt he ſeeks by artificial methods to give a livelier energy and more active current to the half-frozen blood, that lethargically creeps in his veins, he will preſume to condemn what he cannot underſtand, and to depreciate beauties that he cannot feel. The blind, unleſs their underſtanding alſo is obſcured, do not from their own imperfect ideas pretend to judge of colours; yet how many are there ever forward to ſettle the ſtandard of ſenſibility from their own benumbed faculties, and becauſe their nerves require to be rouſed and ſtimulated

ſtimulated by more pungent ſmells, pronounce the roſe to be without fragrance. There is beſides another cauſe, why we are not ſo enamoured with the charms of Italian poetry, as of the Latin and Greek, and which is to be imputed to the general method of our education. From our infancy we are taught to read and admire the works of the Grecian and Roman poets: and it is well known that a taſte, as well as a habit, is to be acquired. Thus it fares with our opinions, as with our principles, imbibed in the early part of our life, which if good are not ſoon to be perverted, or if bad, not eaſily to be eradicated. Stricken in our youthful days with a glimmering of beauty in the author at that time before us, in our riper years we purſue it, as the

the traveller follows the diſtant and unſteady taper: the little difficulties and obſcurities once removed, and ourſelves once arrived at the ſource of light, we then, like him, ſit down contented. Captivated with the proſpects preſented to us in our journey, we view with pleaſure the ſame ſcenes again and again, nor wiſh to extend our progreſs beyond the claſſic pale; as if the pure fountains that watered the antient Latium had ceaſed to flow in the modern Italy, or the flowers that decked their margins had now forgotten to bloom. Initiated too betimes in the myſteries of the heathen mythology, we are induced to look upon other ſyſtems as ill adapted to poetry, and to regard as trivial and abſurd the feats of magicians, ſprites, and fairies, whilſt

we

we hear with pleaſure of a drunken Silenus, or a libidinous Jove. Some indeed there are, to whom the knowledge of the Italian language forms a part of their education; but theſe are men of buſineſs, who purſue the path that leads to the temple of fortune, not of ſcience. Others in the politer world are in general ſatisfied with a ſmattering ſufficient to qualify them for the tour of Europe; but few, very few, endeavour to obtain a critical knowledge of it. Nor will this alone, as has been obſerved before, enable us to judge of the merit of an author, for there are national, there are local beauties to be perceived by thoſe only, to whom his country, and the diſpoſition of his countrymen, are not wholly unknown. Not to confine ourſelves to modern, there might be many inſtances

inſtances given in the antient languages to prove the truth of this aſſertion. We read in Horace of the

Præceps Anio, et Tiburni lucus, et uda
Mobilibus Pomaria rivis.

It has puzzled many to find out the true meaning of the word mobiles, and Dacier, the French critic, has in its place adopted the word ductiles; but had Dacier been placed but for a moment on the banks of the Teverone a little below Tivoli, he would have rejected with diſdain his own alteration, and felt, with Mr. Addiſon, the ſingular beauty and propriety of the expreſſion as it ſtands in Horace. Again in Martial;

O nemus, o fontes, ſolidumque madentis arenæ
Littus, et æquoreis ſplendidus Anxur aquis!

A common reader will find nothing very ſtriking in the æquoreis ſplendidus Anxur aquis; but let him take a view of Terracina and its white impending cliffs in a ſerene evening, the ſun verging towards the weſt, his beams as yet entire, and the ſcene before his eyes will, I am certain, illuſtrate the foregoing paſſage, more than the moſt laboured and learned comment, and point out to him a beauty that he never dreamt of.

And here I cannot help expreſſing my ſurprize, that a perſon of Mr. Addiſon's refined taſte and claſſical knowledge, ſhould not only have been inſenſible to the beauty of a deſcription

deſcription ſo juſt and at the ſame time ſo pictureſque, but that he ſhould likewiſe have totally miſunderſtood the paſſage quoted above. Thus it is that he has rendered it into Engliſh.

Ye warbling fountains, and ye ſhady trees,
Where Anxur feels the cool refreſhing breeze
Blown off the ſea, and all the dewy ſtrand
Lies cover'd with a ſmooth unſinking ſand.

That Anxur from its ſituation was refreſhed with breezes from the ſea, and that it was choſen on that account by the Romans for a ſummer retirement, I do not intend by any means to diſpute: nay further I am ready to allow, that the word ſplendidus is ſometimes uſed metaphorically by the beſt claſſical writers to ſignify famous; and can therefore eaſily conceive that a perſon unacquainted

unacquainted with the Roman poets, and who had never ſeen Anxur, might have tranſlated the lines above in the ſame manner as Mr. Addiſon has done, and celebrated the place as being famous for its grateful coolneſs. But the word ſplendidus is here undoubtedly uſed in its moſt ſimple and original meaning, and ſignifies ſhining. I have attempted the following tranſlation, or rather paraphraſe, not preſuming that it will rival Mr. Addiſon's in poetical merit, but becauſe I think it may ſerve to ſhew the true meaning of Martial, which to me Mr. Addiſon ſeems to have wholly miſtaken.

O woods! o ſtreams! o moiſt yet printleſs ſtrand!
Anxur, that doſt the ſmiling deep command,

From

From whence reflected, quivering ſun-beams play,
And on thy glittering rocks reſume the parting day.

Not to confirm what I ſay from the following line of Horace,

Impoſitum ſaxis latè candentibus Anxur;

I will content myſelf with explaining the paſſage in queſtion from another of Martial himſelf. In his dedication to his fifth book of Epigrams we find the following lines,

Seu placet Æneæ nutrix, ſeu filia ſolis,
Sive ſalutiferis candidus Anxur aquis.

In which the word candidus has preciſely the ſame meaning as ſplendidus, both ſignifying bright or ſhining.

ON

ON THE

TORRISMONDO

OF

TASSO.

THE author ſeems to have choſen his ſubject according to the direction of Ariſtotle, who ſays, in the tenth chapter of his poetics, that the misfortunes of a perſon partly innocent and partly guilty are the propereſt ſubject for a tragedy; as we are naturally led to pity thoſe, who have erred rather through accident than deſign, and

who have brought calamities on themſelves without any intentional or premeditated reſolution to commit any enormous crime. Although Torriſmondo was certainly guilty of a breach of friendſhip to Germondo, yet we are induced to pity him, when we find him, in conſequence of it, involved in an inceſtuous marriage with his own ſiſter. When the diſcovery is upon the point of being made, we tremble for this innocently guilty man; forget his infidelity to his friend, and ſympathize with him in ſo diſtreſsful a ſituation. The beauteous, the innocent, the hapleſs Alvida excites in us a ſtill greater degree of compaſſion, when we find her, like a ſecond Jocaſta, involuntarily led into an union, which mankind from their infancy have

have been taught to view with horror.

—Teque etiam perhibent, Alvida, decorum
Poſſediſſe nefas; vultus hâc laude colebas,
Heu quibus heu placitura toris!
Statii Thebaid.

Much dialogue and long orations mixed with too many moral reflections prevail thoughout the whole piece; the ſpeeches are in many places of an enormous length, and conſequently little ſuited to a theatrical repreſentation: at the ſame time the thoughts are juſt, the diction elegant, the verſe harmonious, and the choruſſes breathing the animated ſpirit of genuine and ſublime poetry. The firſt of them in particular is worthy of the great Taſſo, and written in a ſtyle,

that would have done honour to the moſt celebrated author, that modern times can boaſt. What can exceed the beauty of the following lines in it, or what words be found more expreſſive of their import?

E'n queſto clima ov' Aquilon rimbomba
E con tre ſoli impallidiſce il giorno,
Di fare oltraggio e ſcorno
Al ciel tentar poggiando altri giganti.
E monte aggiunto a monte, e tomba a tomba,
Alte ruine e ſcogli in mar ſonanti
A folgori tonanti
Son opre degne ancor di chiara tromba.

But I ſhould take up too much of the reader's time were I to lay before him every beautiful paſſage in the Torriſmondo of Taſſo. All I could wiſh is to be able to reſcue the Italian poets from the neglect that has been unjuſtly ſhewn them; and

and if I cannot recommend the tragedy in queſtion, as a piece perfectly adapted for theatrical repreſentation, on account of its great length, I may venture to aſſert that in the cloſet it will not fail to afford the higheſt entertainment.

ON THE MEROPE OF MAFFEI.

THE marquis Scipio Maffei has been happy in the choice of the ſubject of his tragedy. Ariſtotle in the eleventh chapter of his poetics declares that to be one of the moſt intereſting ſcenes on the Greek theatre, in which Merope is on the point of killing him, whom at that very inſtant ſhe diſcovers to be her ſon. And Plutarch relates that the Greeks, who were a people of keen ſenſibility and the niceſt

feelings, trembled with apprehenſion leaſt the old man ſhould arrive too late to ſtop the uplifted arm of the miſtaken mother.

A ſimplicity and naïveté prevails throughout the Merope of Maffei, that to thoſe, who are converſant only with modern productions, will perhaps appear unworthy the dignity of the tragic muſe; who, from treading with gravity and ſteadineſs in the buſkin, has for ſome time paſt been tottering in ſtilts: and the pure unaffected language of nature has given place to mighty nothings, and, lofty, but unmeaning words. By the language of nature in tragedy, I would not be underſtood to mean the rude unpoliſhed jargon of a barbarous crew, but the generous and artleſs ſentiments

ments of the brave and good; the manly and glowing, yet unaffected, effuſions of noble minds; the hardy and daring thoughts of the greatly wicked; ſuch as we may ſuppoſe their diſpoſitions would ſuggeſt, and that do not ſeem to be dictated by the poet. Thoſe on the contrary, who are not wedded to the preſent mode of writing, but who can ſtill find charms in the Grecian poets, who read with ſenſibility, yet approve with diſcretion, will allow great merit to the tragedy of Maffei, and acknowledge to be

—Sophocleo ſua carmina digna cothurno.

To hear Poliphontes make love to Merope, who is already advanced in years, may at firſt ſight ſeem highly

highly ridiculous, but whoever looks in the leaſt beyond the ſurface of things, will ſoon perceive that Poliphontes is acting the hypocrite, and that ſo far from loving, he bears hatred towards Merope, and that he aſſumes the innamorato merely to promote his own intereſt. By marrying her he hopes to conciliate the affections of an enraged people, and to ſecure to himſelf the quiet poſſeſſion of that throne, from which their indignation threatened daily to remove him.

In the ſecond act, when Merope is venting her grief for the ſuppoſed loſs of her ſon, and blaming the injuſtice of the gods; Euriſo endeavours to alleviate her ſorrows, obſerves that the ways of fate are inſcrutable, and reminds her of the

ſtill

ſtill more unhappy ſituation of Agamemnon, who was compelled to ſacrifice his own daughter at the expreſs injunction of the gods. To this with a ſenſibility peculiar to a woman, and which ſhews at the ſame time the author's profound knowledge of human nature, ſhe anſwers,

O Euriſo, non avrian già mai gli Dei
Ciò comandato ad una Madre.

Could there be given a more unanſwerable objection to any arguments of conſolation; can any thing be more expreſſive of maternal affection?

In the third act we ſee Merope ready to execute vengeance on Egiſtus, whom ſhe ſuppoſes to be the

the murderer of her ſon. At the inſtant ſhe offers to plunge the dart in his boſom, he exclaims,

—O cara madre
Se in queſto punto mi vedeſſi!

At the name of mother her arm heſitates to fulfil her intended revenge; a mother's unhappy ſituation awakens in her a tranſient ſenſation of pity, and ſhe aſks with tenderneſs

—Hai una madre.

But after a moment's pauſe, when ſhe reflects that ſhe herſelf enjoys no longer that endearing tie, and that it is, as ſhe ſuppoſes, no other than Egiſtus who has robbed her of that enviable title, ſhe adds,

—Barbaro, madre
Fui ben anche io, e ſol per tua cagione

Or

Or no'l ſon più: queſt 'è ciò, che ti perde:
Morrai fiero ladron.

Here the author has preſented us with a delineation of paſſions, copied with fidelity from nature, drawn in the moſt vivid and forcible manner, and in colours that can never fade.

As he has choſen to imitate the chaſteneſs of the Greek theatre, he could not introduce upon the ſcene the death of Poliphontes; yet if ever narration can be ſuppoſed comparable to the force of repreſentation, I may venture to ſay it is ſo in this tragedy. The deſcription that Iſmene gives of the manner in which Creſphontes ſlew the tyrant at the altar, of the effect it had upon the ſpectators, and of the behaviour of

Merope

Merope on the occaſion, is delivered in ſo animated a ſtyle, with circumſtances ſo intereſting and affecting, as to equal in its influence over the paſſions of a ſenſible mind, all that the Gothic and barbarous apparatus of racks, bloody daggers, and poiſoned bowls are capable of producing. Theſe indeed may be neceſſary to ſtimulate and work upon the hardened and callous heart of the vulgar; but from theſe the generous and feeling part of the audience ſhrink back with horror and diſguſt. The tragedy before us is not only intereſting and pleaſing, which is the moſt that many of the modern ones have to boaſt, but it is highly moral and inſtructive: for villany is puniſhed in the example of Poliphontes, innocence protected and righted in that of Creſphontes,

phontes, and virtue and long-ſuffering rewarded in that of Merope.

As the utmoſt effort of human genius can never, even in its moſt elaborate endeavours, arrive at perfection, we muſt not hope to find it in the Merope of Maffei. The ſcenes are ſometimes not properly connected, the actors ſometimes appear and retire without reaſon, and the dialogue in one or two places may be ſaid to follow nature too cloſely, and conſequently not to be ſufficiently ſonorous and elevated. The ſpeech of Poliphontes in the third act, in which he ſays, he will put in practice the true art of governing, is very improper and abſurd. He there reſolves to put to death the brave and generous, to encourage vice, and to promote civil diſcord

diſcord amongſt his ſubjects. If ſuch were to be the policy of monarchs, their empires would be but of ſhort duration; for where virtue is oppreſſed, and vice cheriſhed, anarchy and confuſion muſt neceſſarily prevail, and a ſpeedy diſſolution of government be the inevitable conſequence. It was without doubt the deſign of the author to place before us the tyrant as an object of deteſtation, but in delineating good or bad characters extremes are to be equally avoided: the beſt are not exempt from failings, the worſt not wholly unacquainted with virtue, or at leaſt not entirely inſenſible of the beauty of it in others. But the marquis Maffei is by no means the only one who has fallen into this error, we find it common to moſt tragic writers of all nations.

Many

Many of them have far exceeded him in extravagance, and their characters of villainy are so much exaggerated, that they cease to be designs from nature, and become mere unintelligible sketches of their own wayward fancies, losing their intended effect: for such ideal beings can have no influence over minds already inclined to wickedness; they can neither reform such dispositions by their repentance, warn by their punishment, nor intimidate by their death. The villain that would see unmoved the death of Mirza,* would with a conscious apprehension of his own life and safety, tremble at the fate of a Lothario ‡. In the one he might chance to discover some resemblance

* Vide Rowe's Ambitious Step-mother.

‡ Vide Fair Penitent.

of himſelf; in the other the characters of nature would be illegible.

Notwithſtanding the faults already mentioned, and ſome perhaps unnoticed, the tragedy of Merope muſt be acknowledged to be equal to moſt that are extant; at leaſt by thoſe, who have a competent knowlege of the language, in which it is written, who are unprejudiced in their opinions, who are not wholly ignorant of the method of education, the manners and ſenſibility of the nation, for whom it was compoſed, and who are firmly perſuaded, that what is calculated for the meridian of Italy, muſt differ eſſentially from what is adapted to the genius and taſte of the inhabitants of a northern iſland. But many are too ready to judge

and

and decide, although they are but imperfectly verſed in the language, and have but a very ſuperficial knowledge of the author they cenſure; a knowledge that extends perhaps little further than the title-page: yet ſurely the beauties of a temple are not all comprized in its portico, nor is its veſtibule the ſeat of its gods. We are likewiſe in general too apt to judge of others by our own ſtandard, and to make little or no allowance for the ſentiments and ideas peculiar to people of different countries. Let the Norwegian behold with tranſport his native mountains, down whoſe headlong ſteeps the foaming torrent ruſhes with fury into the rebellowing valley below; but let him not blame an inhabitant of the Campagna Felice, if he gazes with e-

qual rapture on thoſe ſmiling meads, through which the gentle ſmooth-flowing Liris * winds its eaſy and inſenſible way;

—qui fonte quieto
Diſſimulat curſum, et nullo mutabilis imbre
Perſtringit tacitas gemmanti gurgite ripas.
Sil. Ital. lib. iv.

ON

* Now called Garigliano.

ON THE

OPERA

OF

METASTASIO

CALLED,

LA CLEMENZA DI TITO.

WITHOUT noticing the airs, I mean to conſider this opera, as a tragic compoſition; and to endeavour to convince the reader, that this branch of the art of poetry is at preſent cultivated by the Italians with no inconſiderable

degree of merit and perfection. Methinks I already ſee the ſelf-ſufficient critic, whoſe knowledge is confined to his own, or at moſt to the dead languages, ſmile with contempt at the word, opera: methinks I hear him already exclaim, with a rancour peculiar to pedantry, petulance, or ignorance, that Italian operas have no intrinſic merit; that they are compoſed of words, calculated only to be the vehicle of muſic, and that though the ear is delighted, neither the heart nor the judgment is intereſted or improved. And all this he will poſitively affirm and tenaciouſly maintain upon the authority of Mr. Addiſon. With all due deference to a name ſo reſpectable, I would by no means have the world yield implicit obedience to his, or any other

other critic's animadverſions; but could wiſh that all, who are capable, would read and determine for themſelves. Beſides, in reſpect to Italian literature, there is great reaſon to believe that Mr. Addiſon was influenced by prejudice or partiality. It is however neceſſary to be obſerved, that if Mr. Addiſon had confined his cenſures and ridicule to Italian operas only, he would have had reaſon and juſtice on his ſide: in his days they were not leſs abſurd than he repreſents them to be; the genius of Metaſtaſio had not then ariſen to invalidate and refute his ſtrictures. Yet this ſame ingenious and learned critic, who laboured with ſuch poignant and well directed ridicule to reclaim his countrymen from their falſe taſte, and to point out to them

the abſurdities of the Italian operas of thoſe days; this ſame juſtly admired writer compoſed a thing, which he called the opera of Roſamond. Nay further, there has been found an author, and one not of the loweſt claſs, I mean Mr. Tickell, who in defiance of common ſenſe, and in a poem worthy of a better ſubject, has chaunted forth the praiſes of this deſpicable performance. O ſhame! where is thy bluſh?

In the firſt ſcene of the Clemenza di Tito, Vitellia, actuated by motives of jealouſy and revenge, inſtigates Seſtus, her lover, to the murder of Titus. On finding him wavering and undetermined, ſhe reproaches him for his irreſolution;

for

for which he accounts in the following manner.

Vitellia aſcolta,
Ecco io t'apro il mio cor. Quando mi trovo
Preſente à te non ſo penſar, non poſſo
Voler che à voglia tua: rapir mi ſento
Tutto nel tuo furor: fremo à tuoi torti:
Tito mi ſembra reo di mille morti.
Quando à lui ſon preſente
Tito (non ti ſdegnar) parmi innocente.

He then endeavours to diſſuade her from her cruel intention.

Penſaci, o cara,
Penſaci meglio. Ah non togliamo in Tito
La ſua delizia al mondo, il padre a Roma,
L'amico a noi. Fra le memorie antiche
Trova l'egual ſe puoi. Fingiti in mente
Eroe più generoſo, o più clemente.
Parlagli di premiar; poveri a lui
Sembran gli erari ſui.
Parlagli di punir; ſcuſe al delitto
Cerca in ognun. Chi all' ineſperta ei dona,
Chi alla canuta età. Riſparmia in uno
L'onor

L'onor del ſangue illuſtre: il baſſo ſtato
Compatiſce nell' altro. Inutil chiama,
Perduto il giorno ei dice,
In cui fatto non ha qualcun felice.

It would be no eaſy matter to find a character drawn in more amiable colours, or more fully comprized in ſo few words. Thoſe, who are not verſed in the annals of antient hiſtory, are thus prepared to find him that wonderful man, that pattern of human perfection he afterwards appears. In the remaining part of the ſcene we ſee the powerful effects of jealouſy and love: Vitellia perſiſts in reſolving the death of Titus, and Seſtus, though virtuouſly diſpoſed, rather than loſe her, ſubmits to take upon him the execution of her infernal vengeance. Were I not to treſpaſs too much on the reader's patience, as I ſhall have occaſion

occaſion to cite ſome other paſſages, I could find myſelf inclined to place before him the whole of the eighth ſcene; in it there are maxims contained, to which the wiſeſt legiſlator might attend with advantage, and a greatneſs of mind diſplayed, which the moſt glorious monarchs would do well to imitate. The ſecond act opens with the following ſoliloquy of Seſtus, now engaged in a conſpiracy againſt the life of Titus.

Oh dei, che ſmania è queſta!
Che tumulto ho nel cor! Palpito, agghiaccio,
M' incamino, m' arreſto; ogn'aura, ogn'ombra
Mi fa tremare. Io non credea, che foſſe
Si difficile impreſa eſſer malvagio.
Ma compirla convien: già per mio cenno
Lentulo corre al Campidoglio. Io deggio
Tito aſſalir. Nel precipizio orrendo
È ſcorſo il piè. Neceſſità divenne
Ormai la mai ruina. Almen ſi vada

Con

Con valore a perir. Valore? e come
Può averne un traditor? Seſto infelice,
Tu traditor! Che orribil nome! E pure
T'affretti a meritarlo. E chi tradiſci?
Il più grande, il più giuſto, il più clemente
Principe della terra: a cui tu devi
Quanto puoi, quanto ſei. Bella mercede
Gli rendi in vero. Ei t'innalzò per farti
Il carnifice ſuo. M'inghiotta il ſuolo
Pria ch'io tal divenga. Ah non ho core
Vitellia, a ſecondar gli ſdegni tui:
Morrei prima del colpo in faccia a lui.
S'impediſca - - - - - ma come
Or che tutto è diſpoſto - - - - Andiamo,
andiamo
Lentulo a trattener. Sieguane poi
Quel che il fato vorrà. Stelle! che miro?
Arde già il Campidoglio! Aimè, l'impreſa
Lentulo incominciò. Forſe già tardi
Sono i rimorſi miei:
Difendetemi Tito, eterni Dei.

How naturally do theſe ſentiments ſeem to preſent themſelves to a man of a diſpoſition by nature honeſt, but urged through the influence of an

an irreſiſtable paſſion to attempt a crime which his ſoul abhors. We find here no ſtudied expreſſions, no obſcure alluſions, no miſplaced ſimilies. Although figures of ſpeech might ſuggeſt themſelves on other occaſions, in his ſituation they would be unnatural. A perſon in his circumſtances can hardly be ſuppoſed to ſee daggers in the air, nor would the ideas of ſleep, dreams, witchcraft, Hecate, wolves, the rape of Lucretia, and giants croud all at once upon his mind, too much occupied with the thoughts of what he is about to commit, to ſuffer him to attend to circumſtances, which, though not foreign to the purpoſe, are at moſt but collaterally connected with it. The reader will perceive that I allude to a ſpeech of Macbeth's, in which he fancies

fancies he ſees the dagger before him, and particularly to the following lines, which he ſpeaks juſt before he enters Duncan's chamber to murder him.

— Now o'er one half the world
Nature ſeems dead, and wicked dreams abuſe
The curtain'd ſleep; now witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings: and wither'd murder
(Alarum'd by his ſentinel the wolf,
Whoſe howl's his watch) thus with his ſtealthy pace,
With Tarquin's raviſhing ſtrides tow'rds his deſign,
Moves like a giant.

Theſe lines may to ſome appear beautifully deſcriptive, but in my opinion ſo much imagery carries with it the appearance of ſtudy, and to me therefore they ſeem but ill adapted to the ſituation of the ſpeaker. On the other hand in the ſoliloquy

ſoliloquy of Seſtus we find no ſimile, no alluſion to any ſtory of antiquity, and even the metaphorical expreſſion is of the ſimpleſt kind.

—Nel precipizio orrendo
E ſcorſo il pié.

The breaks and pauſes in the ſpeech are introduced with great beauty and propriety, and are expreſſive of the horror he feels, and the difficulty he labours under to effect what is ſo repugnant to his nature; and at laſt is not able to ſummon hardineſs enough to execute ſo foul a murder. When Titus can no longer doubt of the infidelity and ingratitude of Seſtus, whom he loved and cheriſhed, he makes the following obſervations on his treachery and his own unhappy ſituation.

Che orror! Che tradimento!
Che nera infedeltà! Fingersi amico
Essermi sempre al fianco; ogni momento
Esiger dal mio core
Qualche prova d'amore, e starmi intanto
Preparando la morte! Ed io sospendo
Ancor la pena? E la sentenza ancora
Non segno - - - Ah si lo scelerato mora.
Mora - - - - ma senza udirlo
Mando Sesto a morir? Si: già l'intese
Abbastanza il senato. E s'egli avesse
Qualche arcano a svelarmi? (Ola!) [*to his guard*]
s'ascolti,
E poi vada al supplicio. (A me si guidi
Sesto) E pur di chi regna
Infelice il destino! A noi si niega
Ciò che a' più bassi è dato. In mezzo al bosco
Quel villanel mendico, a cui circonda
Ruvida lana il rozzo fianco, a cui
E mal fido riparo
Dall' ingiurie del ciel tugurio informe,
Placido e sonni dorme:
Passa tranquillo i dì: molto non brama:
Sa chi l'odia, e chi l'ama: unito o solo
Torna sicuro alla foresta, al monte;
E vede il core a ciascheduno in fronte.
Noi fra tante grandezze
Sempre incerti viviam: che in faccia a noi

La

La ſperanza o il timore
Su la fronte d'ognun trasforma il core.

The latter part of this ſpeech breathes an elegant ſimplicity peculiar to Metaſtaſio; the thoughts, although not new, he has made his own by the dreſs he has given them; and there is beſides a wonderful harmony in the metre and language, an art in which the author ſhines without a rival; for whatever may be his faults, I may venture to ſay, that he has a finer ear than any poet. The following ſentiment of Titus may ſerve to ſhew that Metaſtaſio is not a ſtranger to the ſublime.

—Il torre altrui la vita
E facoltà comune
Al più vil della terra: il darla è ſolo
De' Numi, e de' Regnanti.

Such are a few of the beauties of this opera, which diveſted of its airs, is far more regular in its plan and conduct than many compoſitions, that are dignified with the names of tragedies; ſuch are the works of ſome Italian writers, which the ignorance of many and the partiality of a few brand with the name of puerilities and trifles. I muſt beg leave to be indulged in quoting a paſſage from a ſhort poem of Metaſtaſio, to ſhew that his excellence is not confined to the compoſition of operas only; indeed his other poems do him ſtill greater honour. The lines are part of a cantata entitled, The Advice to Thirſis.

Se credi a que' ſoavi
Atti corteſi, onde adeſcar ti vedi;

Se

Se a quegli ſguardi credi
Che languidi e furtivi
Fiſſa ne' tuoi; ſe a quel parlar ti fidi
Che ſi poco promette
E fa tanto ſperar; pietoſa amante
Già tu la crederai:
Ah pur io l'ho creduto: e m' ingannai.
E luſinga, e follia. Nice non ama
Che de begli occhi ſui
Il trionfo in altrui: Nice non gode
Che al vederſi ogni dì creſcer d'intorno
De' miſeri la ſchiera: i nuovi alletta,
Gli antichi inſulta: e pur non v'è chi poſſa
Uſcir di ſervitù. Non ſo qual ſia
L'incognita magia, l'arte che impiega:
So che ſprezza, e innamora; offende e lega.

I hope I ſhall not be accuſed of that prejudice and partiality, which I have condemned in others, when I ſay, that I believe the paſſage quoted above cannot be ſurpaſſed by any thing hitherto written on the ſame ſubject. What a beautiful thought

is the following, and how happily expreſſed.

—Se a quel parlar ti fidi
Che ſi poco promette
E fa tanto ſperar; pietoſa amante
Già tu la crederai:

And the ſubſequent line, in which nature herſelf, and not the poet, ſeems to ſpeak.

Ah! pur io l'ho creduto: e m' ingannai.

This is poetry that does not only tickle the ear, that does not play with the fancy, or by courting and flattering the judgment, ſteal upon the favour of the reader; it ſtrikes at once at the heart, and cannot fail in its aim.

The poems of Metaſtaſio, addreſſed to Nice, are ſo well known as

as to require no further commendations; as long as ſimplicity, elegance, unrivaled ſweetneſs of language, and the moſt exquiſite ſenſibility of ſoul, are qualities to be eſteemed in an author, ſo long will thoſe poems be red and admired.

It may be preſumed, not without reaſon, that the world is in a great meaſure indebted to the imperial family for the works of Metaſtaſio; without their patronage and liberality, he might have remained in obſcurity and want; his genius cramped, his enthuſiaſm unkindled, his tenderneſs and benevolence undiſplayed, his goodneſs unknown. Learn hence, ye princes, not to confine your protection and generoſity to the excellencies of

painting and muſic, but let poetry, their elder ſiſter, partake of your beneficence: ſo ſhall the favourites of the muſes, at preſent perhaps languiſhing and chilled with penury, tranſmit your names to remoteſt poſterity; whilſt warmed with the ſun-ſhine of majeſty, their lyres, like the ſtatue of Memnon, ſhall be attuned to ſounds unheard before.

ON

ON

TASSO.

THE works of Taſſo had been for ſome time the admiration and delight, not only of his own countrymen, but of the politer part of Europe in general; when the French, who were deſirous of taking the lead in letters, as well as in arms, finding him an impediment in their way, determined to remove ſuch an obſtacle, and to build their own reputation on the ruins of his fame. Boileau was the champion in the cauſe: and it is no wonder that the fervid and bold invention of the Italians ſhould be

an object of envy and cenſure to him, who poſſeſſed no ſuch happy talent; to him, whoſe muſe can boaſt but few beauties of her own, and if ſhe ſhines it is with meretricious and ſtolen ornaments, a mere ſervile imitator of the antient ſatyriſts, in whom all their gall is highly concentrated, but in whom no veſtige is to be found of their candour and good-manners. Nor in my catalogue of great and truly reſpectable authors ſhall that man ever find a place, who wantonly, and for the ſake of rhime could ſport with the reputation of another, and as his rancour or good-humour (if he had any) prevailed, could now inſert the name of Quinault, now of Bourſault, or any other of the ſame termination. Little did it become the French to be ſo ſevere on the

Italians

Italians, for in thoſe days they had no epic poem of any merit of their own. It may be doubted if they can boaſt one even at preſent: for the Henriade, although a very fine piece of poetry, is ſcarcely entitled to the name of an epic poem, and that perhaps owing to the ſubject rather than to any fault of the author. In ſuch ſubjects there is little room for invention, and ſtill leſs opportunity for exciting admiration by the marvellous; and invention is not leſs eſſentially neceſſary on the part of the poet, than admiration on the part of the reader; where theſe are wanting a poem will be little more than a gazette in verſe. But it ſeems to have been the joint endeavour of the critics in thoſe days to decry the works of the Italians; Boileau gave the

the word of battle, and himſelf began the attack, whilſt the more puny wits, ſheltered under his example, like Teucer beneath the ſhield of Ajax, dealt out their envenomed and deſtructive arrows. The Engliſh critics too enliſted themſelves under his banners, and with ſuch a leader at their head no quarter could be expected. But why ſhould we ape the French in their ſentiments, as well as their dreſs; or why tamely reſign our own judgment, and then flouriſh and triumph in borrowed ideas? If we muſt imitate them, let it be in their courteous behaviour and general civility to each other; but let us not give into their narrow-minded principle of deſpiſing all nations but their own. In the age of Louis the XIVth, their vain preſumption led

led them to believe that their wits were unrivaled in letters, and their monarch invincible in war; but their military glory was obſcured by the ſuperior luſtre of Britiſh valour: pity it is but they had been taught at the ſame time, that their opinions were not more infallible than their arms.

Boileau was lucky enough to hit upon the Clinquant du Taſſe; this one happy word in a verſe was re-echoed through Europe, and proved fatal to the reputation of the Italian poet. By ſome this cenſure was ſubſcribed to through a partial deference to its author, by others, (and many ſuch there were who ſet themſelves up for critics) becauſe they were too idle or too ignorant to read before they determined, and

poor

poor Taſſo was condemned unheard. Mr. Addiſon adopted the word, and circulated it throughout this kingdom: whilſt the author of the papers on paſtoral poetry in the Guardian, not content with his being ruined in the opinion of moſt as an epic poet, accuſed him of failing in the language, ſentiments, paſſions, and deſigns in the paſtoral ſtyle. But whoever was the author of thoſe papers, I will take upon me to prove that he has either wilfully aſſerted a falſity, with a deſign to impoſe on his readers, or had not red, or did not underſtand the work he preſumed to criticiſe. To prove this it will be neceſſary to quote the following lines from the XXVIIIth number of the Guardian. He there affirms that "Sylvia in Taſſo's "poem enters adorned with a gar-

"land

" land of flowers, and views herſelf " in a fountain with ſuch ſelf- " admiration, that ſhe breaks out " into a ſpeech to the flowers on " her head, and tells them, ſhe " doth not wear them to adorn " herſelf, but to make them aſham- " ed." In direct oppoſition to what is thus confidently aſſerted I will maintain, that Sylvia in Taſſo's poem, ſo far from making the above-mentioned ſpeech to the flowers on her head, doth not make any ſpeech whatever to them. And for the truth of what I thus poſitively inſiſt upon I refer the Italian reader to the Aminta itſelf. The paſſage, on which this falſe and miſtaken criticiſm is founded, is the following ſpeech of Daphne.

Ora per dirti il vero, non mi riſolvo,
Se Silvia è ſimplicetta, come pare

Alle

Alle parole, agli atti: ier vidi un ſegno
Che me ne mette in dubbio. Io la trovò
Là preſſo la Cittade in quei gran prati
Ove fra ſtagni giace un Iſoletta,
Sovra eſſa un lago limpido, e tranquillo,
Tutta pendente in atto, che *parea*
Vagheggiar ſe medeſma, e inſieme inſieme
Chieder conſiglio all'acque, in qual maniera
Diſpor doveſſe in ſù la fronte i crini,
E ſovra i crini il velo, e ſovra'l velo
I fior che tenea in grembo, e ſpeſſo ſpeſſo
Or prendeva un liguſtro, or una roſa,
E l'accoſtava al bel candido collo,
Alle guancie vermiglie, e de' colori
Fea paragone; e poi, ſi come lieta
Della vittoria, lampeggiava un riſo,
Che *parea*, che diceſſe: Io pur vi vinco:
Ne porto voi per ornamento mio,
Ma porto voi ſol per vergogna voſtra
Perchè ſi veggia quanto mi cedete.

Let us obſerve therefore that Daphne, when ſhe found Sylvia leaning over this clear lake, ſays only, that ſhe *ſeemed* to be admiring herſelf, that upon

upon approaching the privet and the roſe to her neck and cheek, ſhe ſmiled, and *ſeemed* to ſay, that ſhe did not wear them to adorn herſelf, but to make them aſhamed. This ſpeech really in the mouth of Sylvia would have been abſurd; but the ſuppoſition of this ſpeech, as it is feigned by Daphne, is extremely natural and juſt; for their characters are diametrically oppoſite. Sylvia is artleſs and innocent, Daphne is an antiquated coquette, and experimentally verſed in all the myſteries of love. Daphne, like the reſt of the world, judges of others by herſelf; had ſhe been in Sylvia's ſituation it is to be preſumed ſhe might have made the very ſpeech ſhe ſuppoſes Sylvia to have done: and Taſſo has herein given us a trait of her character; that

has

has escaped the observation of the critic: but it is no wonder that he was insensible to the finer strokes of a poet, whom he has so grossly and partially misrepresented. Thus to convince us that Tasso ought to be excluded from the class of pastoral poets, he has chosen to produce what he calls an example of his false taste; but which example doth not in fact exist, nor is the author of the papers on pastoral poetry in the Guardian the only one who has censured Tasso for this non-existing absurdity. Mr. Joseph Warton has adopted the same sentiment, and trusting to the authority of this mistaken critic, has been guilty of double injustice to the poet, first, in condemning him for a fault of which he is not guilty, and secondly in omitting to read the passage

in

in queſtion, and in truſting to the aſſertion of another perſon in an inſtance, wherein fame and reputation were at ſtake. This may ſerve as a ſtriking proof of the impropriety of reaſoning and concluding by precedent, as Mr. Pope terms it; for it is extremely probable that critics, who act thus inconſiderately, will ſooner or later have ſufficient cauſe of ſhame and regret, when it appears that they have been induced

To own ſtale nonſenſe which they ne'er invent.
Pope's Eſſay on Criticiſm.

It is evident from Daphne's account that Sylvia did view herſelf in the lake, but nothing further can be aſſerted: nor is there any impropriety or any thing inconſiſtent

with rural ſimplicity in ſuch an action. Do we not read in Theocritus that even the monſter Polypheme viewed himſelf in the ſea; and does not Virgil's Corydon conſult the ſame mirrour? Thus much however may be ſaid in preference of Taſſo to Virgil himſelf in this inſtance, firſt, that a mirrour ſeems more ſuited to the character of a woman, than of a man; and ſecondly, that to thoſe, who are ſuppoſed to follow rural occupations, and the tending on ſheep, a lake ſeems to preſent itſelf more obviouſly and naturally than the ſea. The truth is, as the learned and ingenious Dr. Hurd obſerves *, that Virgil's wonderful judgment for once deſerted him, or he might have retained the ſentiment of Theocritus

* Vide Letter on the Marks of Imitation.

ocritus with a ſlight change in the application.

But allowing that the language and ſentiments in the Aminta were too refined for common paſtoral, yet no objection to it could be raiſed on that account, untill the author of the papers on paſtoral poetry had rejected the prologue to it: admitting that, the piece cannot eaſily be more perfect than it is. But of this he takes no notice, perhaps he knew not that there was a prologue to it. It is thus however that the god of love, who ſpeaks it, delivers himſelf:

Queſte ſelve oggi ragionar d'amore
S' udranno in nuova guiſa: e ben parrafſi
Che la mia Deità ſia quì preſente
In ſe medeſma, e non ne ſuoi miniſtri.

Spirerò nobil ſenſi a' rozzi petti;
Raddolcirò delle lor lingue il ſuono;
Perche ovunque io mi ſia, io ſono amore;
Ne' paſtori non men, che negli eroi;
E la diſuguaglianza de' ſoggetti,
Come a me piace, agguaglio: e queſta è pure
Suprema gloria, e gran miracol mio,
Render ſimili alle più dotte cetre
Le ruſtiche ſampogne.

By this prologue it ſeems as if Taſſo was aware, that the deſign of his poem might be miſtaken, and that he ſhould not eſcape the attacks of envy and detraction. He has therefore given to the god of love thoſe powers, which, if the deity is once admitted, muſt be acknowledged to be inherent in him, in order to obviate and remove all the ſhallow objections, that the nibbling wits of future ages might raiſe againſt him. If indeed the critic had been candid

candid and impartial he would have made a diſtinction, which he has omitted to do; I mean a diſtinction between paſtoral eclogue, and a paſtoral play. The former is the invention of the antients, which they wrought to ſuch perfection, that no modern has an excuſe from deviating from their footſteps: the latter is the invention of the modern Italians, which does them honour, and in which, as the genuine and original authors, they had a right to preſcribe to themſelves what laws they thought proper. And why ſhould we require the ſame rules to be obſerved in diſtinct ſpecies of poetry? Might we not with as much reaſon inſiſt, than an epic poem and a tragedy ſhould be regulated by the ſame laws? For the ſubject and characters in both may be the ſame,

but the manner in which they are to be treated is eſſentially different. Notwithſtanding the joint cenſures of Boileau and his Engliſh adherents, it would be no difficult matter to prove, that there are more inſtances of the beauty of ſentiment and ſimplicity in the works of Taſſo, than in any other poet (the antients excepted) they could have produced to confront with him. But if faſtidious critics are ſo highly offended with a few conceits and inaccuracies of ſtyle in Taſſo, what muſt be their ſentiments on the paſtorals of Mr. Pope, for his errors are of a much groſſer kind? His ſhepherds have the names of antiquity indeed, yet he places them in England, where they talk in the ſame breath of Waller, Granville, Venus and Idalia, Diana and Cynthus,

thus, &c *. In his ſecond paſtoral the ſhepherd's boy addreſſes himſelf to the muſes in the following manner:

Where ſtray ye, muſes, in what lawn or grove,
While your Alexis pines in hopleſs love?
In thoſe fair fields where ſacred Iſis glides,
Or elſe where Cam his winding vales divides?

I am afraid this ſhepherd's boy will be found to be but a bad geographer, for I confeſs I know of no winding vale that Cam divides, unleſs a continued flat and fen merit ſuch an appellation. A few lines afterwards he ſays,

And yet my numbers pleaſe the rural throng,
Rough ſaytrs dance, and Pan applauds the ſong.

* Vide Paſtoral I.

Now it would be no eaſy matter to conceive how it happened that theſe cloven-footed deities ſhould dance on the banks of the Thames, for there the ſcene of this paſtoral is placed. Far be it from me to wiſh that theſe elegant poems ſhould be rejected; at the ſame time it is certain that they are much more faulty and inconſiſtent than the Aminta of Taſſo; but whilſt I am ſenſible of their defects, I cannot be blind to their beauties. If they are not paſtorals, they are, as Mr. Pope himſelf ſays, ſomething better*. But the Aminta of Taſſo is no chance dialogue of two ſhepherds, it is no paſtoral eclogue, it never was meant for ſuch; and conſequently, as a new ſpecies of poetry, it is not ſubject to the rules of paſtoral eclogues, but

* Vide Guardian, No. XL.

but it is governed by its own, like the hiſtorical plays of Shakeſpear; to which, as of an original and peculiar kind, we are no more to apply the laws of the Stagyrite, than of the Grand Signor. Thus much for the Aminta of Taſſo. Let us now ſee if among the Clinquant, as the French drawcanſir terms it, of the Gieruſalemme Liberata, we cannot diſcover ſome genuine and native gold. We will, if the reader be not ſtartled at the propoſal, begin with the devil, who is thus deſcribed.

Orrida maeſtà nel fero aſpetto
Terrore accreſce e più ſuperbo il rende,
Roſſeggian gli occhi, e di veneno infetto,
Come infauſta cometa, il guardo ſplende.
Gli involve il mento, e ſù l'irſuto petto
Iſpida e folta la gran barba ſcende:
E in guiſa di voragine profonda
S'apre la bocca d'atro ſangue immonda.

Qual'

Qual' i fumi ſulfurei, e infiammati
Eſcon di Mongibello, e'l puzzo, e'l tuono;
Tal de la fera bocca i negri fiati,
Tale il fetore, e le faville ſono.
Mentre ei parlava, Cerbero i latrati
Ripreſſe, e l' Idra ſi fè muta al ſuono:
Reſtò Cocito, e ne tremar gli Abiſſi.

Theſe lines alone are ſufficient to prove that the Italian language has energy and powers equal to the boldeſt and moſt ſublime images. Let this deſcription, and the ſpeech that follows it, be compared with the deſcription of Satan, and his ſpeech, in the Paradiſe Loſt of Milton, who has imitated the Italian poet it this as well as in many other inſtances; let impartiality hold the ſcales, and then ſee if they will not preponderate on the ſide of Taſſo. The idea of the above paſ-

ſage

ſage is certainly taken from Claudian * by Taſſo, nevertheleſs he has made it his own by throwing in ſome new and ſublime thoughts, which give to it an air of original greatneſs.

After being preſented with a picture of ſo much majeſtic horror, we are ſtricken with another of a more engaging nature; and of ſo different a kind, that we can hardly conceive it poſſible, that it ſhould have been drawn by the ſame pencil. The inimitable deſcription of Armida is what I allude to.

Argo non mai, non vide Cipro o Delo
D'abito ò di beltà forme sì care.
D'auro ha la chioma, e or dal bianco velo
Traluce involta, or diſcoperta appare.
Così qual' or ſi raſſerena il cielo,
Or da candida nube il ſol traſpare;

Or

* De Raptu Proſerpinæ, lib. i.

Or da la nube uſcendo, i raggi intorno
Più chiari ſpiega, e ne raddoppia il giorno.

Fa nove creſpe l'aura al crin diſciolto,
Che natura per ſe rincreſpa in onde ;
Staſſi l'avaro ſguardo in ſe raccolto,
E i teſori d'amor, e i ſuoi naſconde.
Dolce color di roſe in quel bel volto
Fra l'avorio ſi ſparge e ſi confonde :
Ma nella bocca ond' eſce aura amoroſa
Sola roſſeggia, e ſemplice la roſa.

Moſtra il bel petto le ſue nevi ignude,
Onde il foco d'amor ſi nutre e deſta.
Parte appar de le mamme acerbe e crude,
Parte altrui ne ricopre invida veſta :
Invida, ma s'à gli occhi il varco chiude,
L'amoroſo penſier già non arreſta ;
Che non ben pago di bellezza eſterna,
Ne gli occulti ſecreti anco s'interna.

It would puzzle the critics, who are ſo ſevere in their animadverſions on the Italians, to produce a paſſage on a ſimilar ſubject from any author,

thor, antient or modern, equal to the foregoing one. The laſt ſtanza may poſſibly be objected to by ſome, and the colouring deemed too glowing and inflamatory; but be it remembered, that it is of Armida that Taſſo ſpeaks, the ſtudied negligence of dreſs will then be found highly characteriſtic, and the deſcription truly beautiful. But it is not only in the deſcription of Armida's perſon that Taſſo is ſo excellent, her whole character is drawn in the ſame maſterly ſtyle, her every action, her every look is ſo happily delineated, that ſhe is on all occaſions

O parli, ò taccia, ò ſi raſſetti, ò rida,
Cara e ſempre dolciſſima omicida.
Bracciolini Scherno degli Dei. Can. viii.

Indeed

Indeed throughout the Gieruſalemme Liberata there is a wonderful diſtinction of characters, which are kept up without varying from themſelves from the beginning to the end of the poem. Homer, who wrote for the Greeks, has nevertheleſs rendered Priam an object of pity and compaſſion: Taſſo, who wrote for the Chriſtians, has placed their enemy Aladin in an odious light. This is a well-contrived artifice, without which it is probable the reader might have been inclined to take part with the Mahometan chief, and to have looked upon the Cruſaders as a crew of lawleſs banditti, and the murderers of a venerable old monarch, who neither by moleſtation nor inſult had given them reaſon to take arms againſt him. In this one inſtance may

may it not be ſaid, without giving offence to the admirers of whatever is antient, that Taſſo has excelled even Homer himſelf?

It is a remark made by Mr. Joſeph Warton in his obſervations on Virgil, that in his Æneid he never loſes ſight of his hero, and that in this point Taſſo has committed a glaring miſtake, by making Rinaldo perform all the moſt difficult and ſhining actions, whilſt Godfrey, who is called the hero of the piece, executes no one thing worthy notice. How far this obſervation of Mr. Warton's may be true as it relates to Virgil, is not to my preſent purpoſe to enquire; with regard to Taſſo it is unqueſtionably falſe. Godfrey, it is true, is the leader and commander of the Cruſaders, as

Agamemnon

Agamemnon was of the Grecians; but Agamemnon was not the hero of the Iliad, nor is Godfrey the hero of Taſſo's poem; if, by the word hero, the critic means a perſon remarkable for military proweſs only. In the Iliad it is Achilles who performs the greateſt feats of valour; in the Gieruſalemme Liberata it is Rinaldo who is moſt conſpicuous for military atchievements. Even in the firſt book Taſſo deſcribes him as ſuperior to the reſt of the Cruſaders in the following moſt beautiful lines.

Ma il fanciullo Rinaldo è ſovra queſti,
E ſovra quanti in moſtra eran condutti:
Dolcemente feroce alzar vedreſti
La regal fronte, e in lui mirar ſol tutti;
L' età precorſe e la ſperanza; e preſti
Pareano i fior quando n' uſciro i frutti;
Se'l miri fulminar ne l'arme avvolto,
Marte lo ſtimi; Amor, ſe ſcopre il volto.

And

And in the fourteenth canto Godfrey is thus admoniſhed by Ugone in a viſion to recall Rinaldo.

Perche ſe l'alta providenza eleſſe
Te de l'impreſa ſommo capitano;
Deſtinò inſieme, ch'egli eſſer doveſſe
De' tuoi conſigli eſecutor ſoprano.
A te le prime parti, a lui conceſſe
Son le ſeconde; tu ſei capo, ei mano
Di queſto campo: e ſoſtèner ſua vece
Altri non puote, e farlo a te non lece.

Thus we find Rinaldo deſtined by providence to be the executor of the moſt hazardous and glorious interprizes, in which Godfrey is expreſsly forbidden to engage. Becauſe Æneas happens to be the commander and hero of the piece at the ſame time, it does not follow that Homer and Taſſo are to blame for not having obſerved the ſame rule. On

the contrary it may be queſtioned, if Virgil has not been guilty of an error in expoſing the perſon of Æneas on ſo many occaſions; for it is the duty of a wiſe and prudent general to avoid all unneceſſary dangers; conſcious as he ought to be, that on his life and ſafety depend the fate and fortunes of his followers. It was beyond all doubt the intention of Taſſo to make Rinaldo the moſt illuſtrious and ſhining military character, as a compliment to his great patron Alphonſo duke of Ferrara, whoſe lineage he derives from Rinaldo *.

Mr. Warton to corroborate his aſſertion that Godfrey, who is called the hero of the piece, performs no one thing worthy notice, tells us, that

* Vide Canto xvii.

that it is Rinaldo who kills all the principal leaders of the enemy: but in this point likewiſe Mr. Warton is miſtaken, for Emireno the leader and commander of the Egyptians falls by the hand of Godfrey *, and not of Rinaldo. And that he was one of the chief characters among the enemy plainly appears from the weighty command, with which he was entruſted, and from the authority of Taſſo himſelf, who calls him

E duce inſieme e cavalier ſoprano
Per cor, per ſenno, e per valor di mano.
Canto xvii.

Had Mr. Warton peruſed the Aminta, he never could have cenſured Taſſo for an abſurdity that does not exiſt in the Aminta: had

* Vide Canto xx.

he peruſed the Gieruſalemme Liberata, he could not have maintained that all the leaders of the enemy fell by the hand of Rinaldo. But in condemning the Aminta he truſted to the authority of another, and ſeems determined to do the ſame injuſtice to the Jeruſalem; for the aſſertion abovementioned is borrowed from Mambrun,* a French Jeſuit and author of ſeveral poems in imitation of Virgil. So that inſtead of delivering his own ſentiments, he has retailed the opinions of two critics, and unfortunately has been deceived by both.

If the claſſical reader is pleaſed with the epiſode of Niſus and Euryalus in Virgil, will not the honeſt loves

* Vide Mambrun. Diſſert. Peripatet. de Poem. Epic.

loves of Gildippe and Odoardo equally intereſt him? Will he not be equally affected by the fates of that brave, conſtant, but hapleſs pair? No objection can be made to a woman thus fighting by the ſide of her huſband; for that there were in thoſe days female warriors is a circumſtance as much to be depended on, as any other hiſtorical fact: beſides

Ne le ſcuole d' Amor che non s'aprende?

Canto i.

An ordinary poet would have thought he had given ſufficient dignity to the character of a monarch by comparing him to Jupiter, as repreſented by any famous painter or ſtatuary of antiquity; not ſo does Taſſo reſt ſatisfied, for after

deſcribing the king of Egypt, he does not ſimply ſay,

Apelle forſe, o Fidia in tal ſembiante
Giove formò,

but adds,

ma giove all'or tonante.
Canto xvii.

And thus by a ſtroke of the genuine ſublime, to the picture of grandeur and majeſty, he joins in the ſtrongeſt colours the idea of creating reverence and fear; and at the ſame time points out a diſtinguiſhing mark of the character he deſcribes. This is not the only inſtance in which Taſſo (if I may be allowed the expreſſion) riſes upon us unexpectedly; I could produce ſeveral other examples, but ſhall content myſelf with one more;

it

it is when Soliman beholds the death of his page;

E in atto ſi gentil languir tremanti
Gli occhi, e cader ſu'l tergo il collo mira:
Così vago è il pallore, e da' ſembianti
Di morte una pietà sì dolce ſpira;
Ch' ammollì il cor, che fu dur marmo avanti,
E'l pianto ſcaturì di mezzo a l' ira.

Here the reader would probably expect the concluſion, but how agreeably is he diſappointed by the two ſubſequent lines:

Tu piangi Soliman? tu che diſtrutto
Miraſti il regno tuo col ciglio aſciutto?

Canto ix.

The ſimilies of Taſſo (a point in which moſt poets fail) are in general well choſen, adapted to the occaſion, and highly finiſhed. The following may with juſtice be in-

cluded in the number of ſuch as have great merit.

Così ſcendendo dal natio ſuo monte
Non empie umile il Pò l'anguſta ſponda:
Ma ſempre più, quanto è più lunge al fonte,
Di nove forze inſuperbito abbonda:
Sovra i rotti confini alza la fronte
Di tauro, e vincitor d'intorno inonda:
E con più corna Adria reſpinge; e pare
Che guerra porti e non tributo al mare.

Canto ix.

I have ſelected this ſimile becauſe it is evident that Taſſo had in view Virgil's deſcription of the Po in his fourth Georgic: but how far inferior is the idea conveyed in the following lines;

Et gemina auratus taurino cornua voltu
Eridanus; quo non alius per pinguiá culta
In mare purpureum violentior effluit amnis.

to that of its ſeeming to carry war and not tribute to the ſea, as ſuggeſted

geſted by the Italian poet. The figure is certainly of the boldeſt kind, but perfectly characteriſtic of the violence and impetuoſity of the river deſcribed: and I defy any one to read the fourth line, I mean to read it with propriety, and not expreſs the increaſe and ſwelling of the waters. Not that I would chuſe to build Taſſo's reputation on ſome beautiful copies, or even improvements on the antients; he has laid the foundation of it on a much more ſolid baſis than that of ſervile imitation, on genuine invention; on fictions, authoriſed and ſupported by the Gothic ſyſtem; which ſeems far more capable, than all the fables of paganiſm, of inſpiring that enthuſiaſtic fire, which is the very ſoul of poetry. Magicians and enchanters, as feigned by the poets, were

were but mere men, tho' ſuppoſed in certain inſtances to have the power of directing and controuling the operations of nature; and as much ſolemnity, dignity, and uniformity of conduct has been attributed to them, as was conſiſtent with their characters. But where ſhall we find the poet, who has done juſtice to the majeſty of the gods? Even the ſublime Homer has failed in this point; for whilſt he exalts the beſiegers of Troy into gods, he ſinks the gods into men. Nay, in one reſpect he renders them inferior to men, for they can by death put an end to their afflictions, but whilſt he repreſents his deities wounded or in tears, and liable to the paſſions, accidents and misfortunes, common to mankind, he has not made their

lives

lives only, but their ſufferings, eternal *.

By the potent wand of magic the poet is enabled to conduct us into regions unexplored before, to preſent us with ſcenes as yet unviewed, and to call forth at will a new creation to ſtrike us with pleaſure and aſtoniſhment. Does he wiſh to excite fear? Fierce demons and malignant ſpirits poſſeſs themſelves of the foreſt ‡, whilſt earthquakes and thunder add to the horror of their hideous forms. Would he inſpire pity? And can he not evoke ſighs and lamentations even from inanimate beings § ? Armed with all the wonder-working powers of magic what is Iſmeno not able to effect?

Iſmen,

* Vide Longin. de ſublimitate. Ed. Pearce. ſect. ix. ‡ Canto xiii. § Canto xiii.

Iſmen, che trar di ſotto a i chiuſi marmi
Può corpo eſtinto, e far che ſpiri e ſenta:
Iſmen, ch' al ſuon de' mormoranti carmi
Fin ne la reggia ſua Pluto ſpaventa.

Canto ii.

Who can climb the mountain with Carlo and Ubaldo amidſt ſuch a variety of horrid monſters, and uncouth ſhapes, without diſmay and trembling; or who penetrate with them into the garden of the enchantreſs Armida without wonder and delight; that garden, in which to them,

Acque ſtagnanti, mobili criſtalli,
Fior vari, e varie piante, erbe diverſe,
Apriche collinette, ombroſe valli,
Selve e ſpelonche in una viſta offerſe:
E quel che 'l bello e' caro accreſce a l'opre
L'arte, che tutto fa, nulla ſi ſcopre.

Canto xvi.

Notwithſtanding

Notwithſtanding Taſſo, in allotting the command to one, and the principal execution to another, has in this reſpect choſen to imitate Homer in preference to Virgil, yet he bears upon the whole a much greater reſemblance to the Roman than to the Grecian poet; particularly in the pathos and ſentimental turn, that prevails throughout the Jeruſalem. And few there are, I am perſuaded, who read with ſenſibility, that are not ready to allow, that Virgil is far more pleaſing than Homer. Many a perſon will be ſatisfied with a careful and attentive peruſal of the Iliad: but there is that in the Æneid and the Jeruſalem, which renders it difficult to the reader to lay them aſide: there is that faſcinating power which allures and engages the mind by ſome

ſome ſecret and inviſible charm, that ſteals upon and captivates the affections; and that makes us unable to reſign, what we hold ſo dear, without heſitation and regret.

FINIS.

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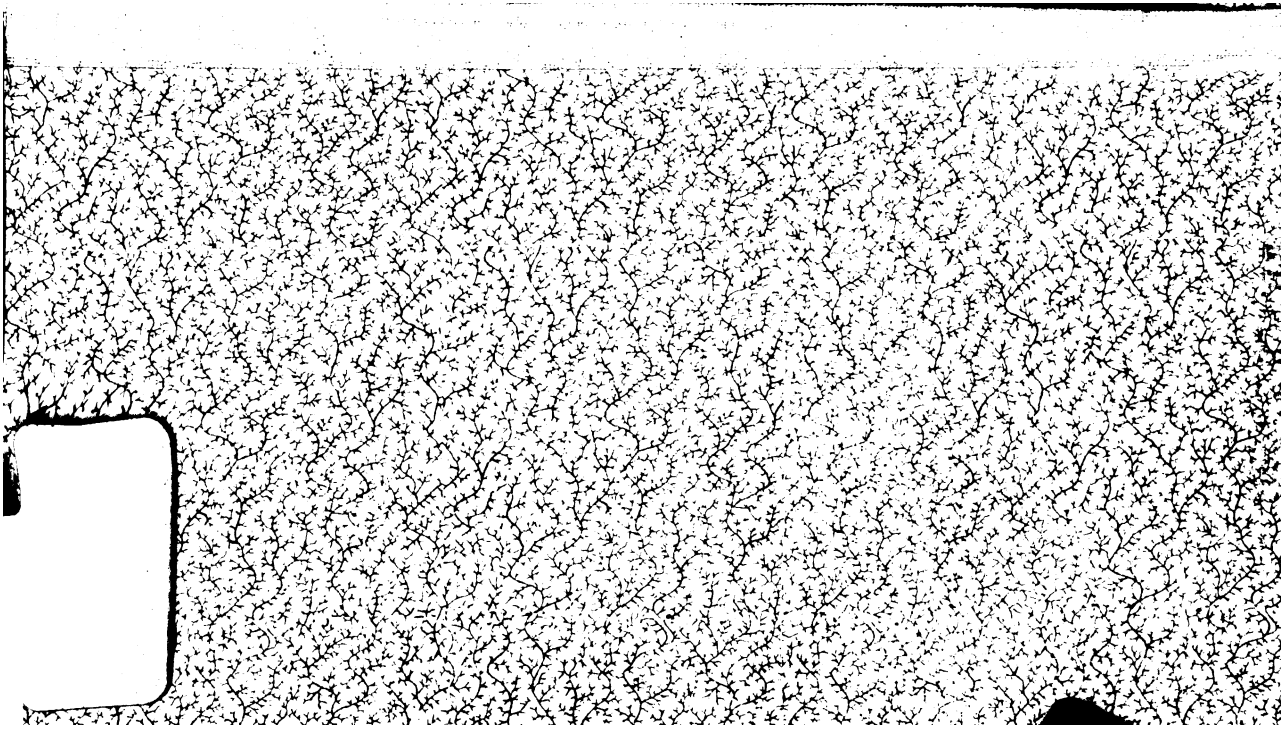
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